

**Presentation by Secretary for the Environment and Food  
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee  
on Wednesday, 27 March 2002**

Mr Chairman,

I am presenting today to the Finance Committee the third Budget of the Environment and Food Bureau. In the financial year of 2002-03, an additional provision of \$400 million is allocated to us for implementing initiatives under the policy portfolios of the Environment and Food Bureau, reflecting the importance the Administration attaches to food hygiene and environment. About 70% of the additional provision will be spent on environment and hygiene. We will step up street cleaning and make visible improvements to the appearance of the city. The provision of these services will bring about 2 600 new jobs. In addition, about 20% will be spent on environmental protection and conservation. We will strengthen the work on environmental protection, especially waste reduction, and implement the plan of providing temporary fill banks. The remaining portion of the increased provision will be spent on agriculture, fisheries and food safety. The Departments concerned will enhance staffing for inspecting Mainland chicken farms and for examining food animals to safeguard public health.

Due to time constraints, I will only highlight the key objectives and initiatives in the coming financial year.

**Upgrade veterinary public health standard**

Our priority for the last two years was upgrading veterinary public health standard. In this area, we have allocated an additional provision of \$23 million for the following reinforcement measures :

- Upgrading the diagnostic capacity of laboratory testing; carrying out more inspections to local farms to strengthen the monitoring and control of food animal diseases and to support the enforcement of the new legislation on the control of misuse of chemicals in animal feeds.
- Carrying out more inspections on food animals in slaughterhouses to monitor more closely the health of food animals awaiting slaughtering.
- Setting up a specialized team for inspection of registered Mainland farms that export food animals to Hong Kong.

- Enhancing staffing for inspecting market stalls and fresh provision shops selling poultry.

With the additional resources allocated, we hope to step up surveillance on the health of food animals to ensure that the public will have safe and hygienic supply of meat. We also hope to raise the standard of the local husbandry industry and promote good rearing practices so that the industry as a whole will be more cost-effective in its operation.

### **Avian Flu**

In the financial year of 2001-02, we spent about \$33 million on the avian flu surveillance system. In the coming financial year, with the additional resources, the expenditure in this area will be about \$39.7 million.

I believe Honourable Members and our community will agree that it is not desirable to invest a huge amount of resources on a long-term basis to combat such a rapidly changing and highly contagious food animal disease as avian flu. I have appointed an Investigation Team to establish the cause(s) of the recent outbreak and to recommend measures to reduce the likelihood of such incidents in future. We will take into account the recommendations of the Investigation Team and consult the relevant Legislative Council Panel in determining the way forward.

### **Food Surveillance**

With regard to food surveillance, FEHD took about 58 000 samples at the importing, manufacturing, wholesaling and retailing stages for testing last year. This is equivalent to a sampling ratio of 8 in a population of 1 000 per year, comparing favourably with the average of 3 in a population of 1 000 per year in other developed countries. In the coming year, FEHD plans to take about 59 000 samples.

FEHD has been determining the priorities of sampling on the basis of risk assessment. Priority sampling is given to foods that are highly perishable; foods with hygiene standards specifically provided by law; and foods involved in previous food incidents etc. FEHD will frequently review its risk assessment of foods and the focus of sampling.

Apart from regular food inspection, FEHD has been conducting risk assessment studies on individual high risk or popular foods. In the coming year, at least 4 of such studies will be conducted.

## **Enhancing the Quality of our Living Environment**

Apart from ensuring food hygiene to safeguard public health, we need also to enhance the quality of our living environment. To improve the appearance of the city, we have been actively engaged in greening and landscaping of our urban areas for the past year. An inter-departmental working group chaired by me is responsible for providing a steer on the overall greening strategy, overseeing and coordinating the effective implementation of the greening programmes by different departments. Apart from active planting, proper maintenance and preservation of trees and vegetation, we will also maximize greening opportunities during the planning and development stages of public works projects and infrastructural projects. In the forthcoming year, the Government will on the whole invest \$260 million to further strengthen our greening efforts.

To improve the living environment, Clean Hong Kong is a task of paramount importance. Since its commencement in late 2000, the Clean Hong Kong (CHK) Programme has raised the public's awareness of the importance of keeping the environment clean. In support of the CHK Programme, the FEHD has enhanced its contracting out of services in late 2001, thereby creating new jobs for enhancing cleansing services. Our next target is to reinforce the efforts in CHK Programme and to step up publicity on the fixed penalty system soon to be implemented.

In terms of environmental protection, we continue to dedicate a great deal of effort to ensure we have clean air, clean water and good waste management.

### **Management of Air Quality**

In the past four years, we have been making substantive and steady progress in improving air quality. Most of the emission reduction measures announced by the Government in 1999 and 2000 have been implemented.

As at the end of last month, the number of LPG taxis has exceeded 14 500, accounting for 80% of the taxi fleet in Hong Kong. In addition, almost 80% of pre-Euro light diesel vehicles (i.e. 24 000 in number) have participated in the Government's subsidy scheme and have been retrofitted with particulate reduction devices. We have also amended the existing regulations to make ultra-low sulphur diesel the statutory motor diesel standard with effect from 1 April 2002.

With the implementation of these emission control measures, improvements have been made. Compared with the figures of 1999, the concentrations of respirable suspended particulates and nitrogen oxides at the street level in urban areas were 8% and 11% lower respectively in 2001. Over the same period, the number of days with exceedance of air pollution

index came down by 45%. The number of smoky vehicles dropped by 50%.

In the coming year, the main focus of our work on vehicle emission control includes the provision of financial assistance for the owners of 41 000 pre-Euro heavy diesel vehicles to retrofit their vehicles with particulate reduction devices. We will also launch a programme to encourage owners of diesel light buses to switch to cleaner fuels.

In addition to our continuous efforts to address the roadside air quality problem, we are also committed to improving the ambient air quality. The “Study of the Air Quality in the Pearl River Delta Region” conducted jointly with the Guangdong Provincial Government has largely been completed and the compilation of the report is nearing completion. The two Governments are expected to reach a consensus by the end of April this year on long-term measures to improve the regional air quality.

### **Improvement of Water Quality**

The Stage I system of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) was fully commissioned in late 2001. The system is now treating about 70% of the sewage being discharged into the Victoria Harbour, and preventing about 600 tonnes of pollutants from entering the Harbour per day. The trials and studies for the remaining stages of the HATS are being carried out. After their completion, we will consult the public with a view to identifying the most suitable option for further improving our water quality.

### **Waste Management**

Last year, with the joint effort of the community, green groups, local organisations, the commercial and industrial sector as well as the government, we achieved some good results. In the past year, 6.10 million tonnes of wastes were disposed of in the three landfills, representing a decrease of around 6% as compared to 6.50 million tonnes in 2000. Instead of recording a steady increase as in the previous years, the volume of municipal solid wastes remained at the level of 2000, i.e. 3.40 million tonnes in 2001. The volume of construction and demolition wastes in 2001 (2.34 million tonnes) was reduced by 13% compared with 2000. Municipal solid wastes recovered last year reached 1.94 millions tonnes, representing an increase of 10% over 2000.

In the coming year, we will continue to reduce and recover wastes and implement our plan to establish a waste recovery park. We will shortly seek the approval of the Legco for injecting \$100 million into the Environment and Conservation Fund, largely for the organization of waste separation and recovery projects at district level. We will continue to implement our plan to provide temporary fill banks and sorting and recycling facilities for construction and demolition materials.

For the purpose of handling unrecyclable wastes, which amount to a few million tonnes every year, we will invite in April the waste management industry to submit Expressions of Interest for developing integrated waste treatment facility(ies) in Hong Kong. I will also set up an advisory group consisting mainly of non-civil servants to assist the government in assessing the submissions. We will later consult the public on the technologies that we can possibly adopt in Hong Kong.