

28 May 2002

Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Chairman of Legislative Council House Committee

Report of the Investigation Team for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident

On behalf of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, I would like to request the Chairman of the House Committee to raise with the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) again, at their meeting on Monday, that the Administration should inform/discuss with the relevant Panel(s) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on important matters before briefing the media.

Regarding the Investigation Team which was set up to investigate the recent avian influenza incident, the Panel had requested, at its meeting on 18 March, that the Environment and Food Bureau (EFB) should provide the Report of the Investigation Team to the Panel. As the Administration had indicated that the Investigation Team would submit a report within six weeks, the Panel requested again at its meeting on 22 April that the Report should be provided to the Panel as soon as possible, for discussion at the meeting scheduled for 27 May.

The Panel noted that the Investigation Team had formally submitted its report to EFB on 18 May and a press conference was held in the afternoon of 24 May. However, EFB had delayed providing the Report of the Investigation Team to the Panel. It was only after repeated requests by myself and the Deputy Chairman of the Panel that EFB finally forwarded the Executive Summary of the Report, with only one printed copy of the full Report, to the Panel after 3:00 p.m. on 24 May.

Many members of the Panel, including the Deputy Chairman and myself, are strongly dissatisfied with EFB's failure to comply with the arrangements for provision of papers by the Government as endorsed by the House Committee on 18 January 2002 (i.e. papers should be provided five clear days before the meeting), and its releasing the Report of the Investigation Team to the press before briefing the Panel.

The Chairman of the House Committee has raised with CS on previous occasions that executive departments should consult LegCo on important matters at the earliest opportunity and brief relevant Panels of LegCo before releasing information to the media. As regards the recent Report on the Review of Payments to Contractors for the West Rail Project and the Report of the Sports Policy Review Team, the relevant bureaux and departments had briefed the Panel on Transport and the Panel on Home Affairs respectively, prior to holding press conferences.

I would like to point out that it is extremely inappropriate for EFB not to submit the Report of the Investigation Team for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident to the Panel at the earliest opportunity, and for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department to release the Report to the media before briefing the Panel. This is very disrespectful of LegCo.

Subject to Members' agreement, I hope that the Chairman of the House Committee will reflect to CS that bureaux and departments should be reminded to consult LegCo on important matters at the earliest opportunity, and to brief the relevant Panels of LegCo before releasing information to the media.

(Fred Li Wah-ming)
Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety
and Environmental Hygiene