

立法會
Legislative Council

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the Administration)

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LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 1 February 2002 at 8:30 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members Present** : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
- Members absent** : Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
- Public Officers Attending** : Mrs Stella HUNG
Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A)
- Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) 1
- Dr S P MAK
Deputy Director (Food & Public Health)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

Ms Rhonda LO
Assistant Director (Operation) 3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr K K LIU
Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Attendance by : The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited
Invitation

Mr SZETO Ning-shun
Deputy Chairman

Mr KWAN Wing-kin
Executive Director

Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association

Mr TSE Fai

Mr NG Po-wing

Mr Alex TAM

Mr FUNG Kin-chung

Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers Association

Mr WONG Kam-kan
Chairman

Mr WONG Wing-nam
Chief General Affairs Officer

Hong Kong New Territories Poultry-Culture (Geese & Ducks) Mutual Aid Association

Mr KWOK Chi-yau
Chairman

Hong Kong Grazers Union

Mr CHAN Yu-yuk

Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association

Mr WONG Tak-leung
Chairman

Miss CHAN Sin-ping
Secretary

Western Slaughterhouse (Ducks and Geese)

Mr Allan NG Ka-lok

Kowloon Fresh Meat Retailer's Association Limited

Mr LAU Shiu-man
Chairman

Yuen Long Fresh Meat Association

Mr MOK Yiu-nam
Chairman

Federation of Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Hawker Association

Mr FUNG Mun-hong
Chairman

Cheung Sha Wan Poultry United Wholesalers Association Limited

Mr CHA Sun
Chairman

Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants Association

Mr WONG Kam-yiu
Chairman

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association

Mr WONG Wai-chuen
Chairman

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association

Mr TSUI Ming-tuen
Chairman

Ms CHAK Chau-ying
Executive Director

Mr LAW Yiu-ming
Executive Director

Advisory Committee on Agricultural and Fisheries of the
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr HUI Hon-man
Committee Member

Hong Kong Retail Management Association

Mr Logan Taylor
Chairman of the Government Regulations Subcommittee and
Executive Committee Member

Mr Keith Bartlett
Supply Chain Director
Parknshop

Mr Charlie Wood
Legal Counsel
The Dairy Farm Co, Ltd.

Mr Henry Nelson
Fresh Food Director - Wellcome
The Dairy Farm Co. Ltd.

Miss Anita Bagaman
Executive Director

Federation of Pig Raising Co-operative Society of Hong Kong,
Kowloon and the New Territories

Mr CHAN Kin-yip

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

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

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I. Issues relating to the cancellation by the Mainland of the export quota for chilled meat supplied to Hong Kong

The Chairman welcomed representatives of the deputations to the meeting.

Views of the deputations

*The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1036/01-02(01)]*

2. Mr SZETO Ning-shun, representative of the Association, said that the Association suggested that all imported chilled chickens should have the heads and claws removed to facilitate consumers to differentiate chilled chickens from fresh chickens. He said that this would also facilitate the Administration's regulatory control of the sale of chilled chickens and enhance the hygiene condition as chicken heads often contained germs.

3. Mr SZETO further said that the Association requested the Administration to set up a Central Delivery Point for all chilled chickens delivered to Hong Kong. He said that at the Central Delivery Point, the authority could examine the health certificates of chilled chickens and inspect the trucks for transporting the chilled chickens to see if the storage temperature requirement was complied with. He further suggested that consignments of chilled meat should be sealed before export, and that the authority should check whether the number of chilled chickens found on a truck tallied with that shown on the relevant official documents.

4. Mr SZETO added that the Administration should adopt the practice of the European Union (EU) that there should be thorough investigation into any problematic

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consignment, and further imports from the same source should be suspended pending such investigation.

Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers Association (PDWA)
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1026/01-02(02)]

5. Mr WONG Kam-kan, representative of PDWA, said that Mainland's abolition of the export quota for chilled meat supplied to Hong Kong would have profound impact on the trade. He said that PDWA was concerned that some of the slaughterhouses/farms in the Mainland might not operate in accordance with stringent hygiene standards. As different provinces, cities or counties in the Mainland could now issue their own health certificates for chilled meat to be exported to Hong Kong, PDWA was concerned as to whether the Administration had adequate manpower to check all consignments of chilled meat and inspect all trucks at control points. Mr WONG further said that PDWA was supportive of the suggestion that all imported chilled chickens should have the heads and claws removed.

Hong Kong New Territories Poultry-Culture (Geese & Ducks) Mutual Aid Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1026/01-02(03)]

6. Mr KWOK Chi-yau, representative of the Association, said that the agriculture and fisheries industries faced immense difficulties in recent years, and Government kept making severe blows to the industries. He queried if it was Government's intention to wipe out agriculture and fisheries industries in Hong Kong so that all products of agriculture and fisheries would be imported from the Mainland. He cited the following examples of harsh measures taken by Government -

- (a) the introduction of livestock waste control in Hong Kong in 1987 forcing 60% of local farms out of business; and
- (b) the introduction of a licensing system for poultry farms in 1994, and 87 poultry farms were still waiting for the issue of licence.

7. Mr KWOK further said that with the abolition of the export quota for chilled meat supplied to Hong Kong, there would be no room for business operation for the local livestock industry. He added that following the abolition of the export quota for chilled ducks and geese supplied to Hong Kong in 1997, the duck/geese rearers in Hong Kong had completely disappeared. He expected that under the Mainland's new policy on export of chilled meat, the local industries concerned (including pond-fish rearing) would be all wiped out within three years, and some 200 000 people would lose their jobs. Mr KWOK considered that Government had not provided assistance to foster the development of local agriculture and fisheries industries.

Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association

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8. Mr WONG Tak-leung, representative of the Association, pointed out that consignments of chilled chickens often arrived in the evening and were left in the car parks overnight. By the time the chilled chickens were delivered to retailers in the next morning, they were already defrosted and customers would not be able to tell that these were not fresh meat. As the trucks carrying such chilled meat did not have refrigerators, he urged the Administration to look into the hygiene problem in transportation and overnight storage of such meat, and to provide a Central Delivery Point for collection and inspection of chilled chickens.

Western Slaughterhouse (Ducks and Geese)

9. Mr Allan NG Ka-lok, representative of the Western Slaughterhouse (Ducks and Geese), said that after the abolition of export quota for geese and ducks in 1998, only 2% to 3% of the ducks and geese consumed in Hong Kong were slaughtered at the Western Slaughterhouse. He urged Government to assess the impact of the Mainland's new policy on the local meat industry.

Kowloon Fresh Meat Retailer's Association Limited (KFRMA)
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 924/01-02(01)]

10. Mr LAU Shiu-man, representative of KFMRA, said that as Hong Kong practised free trade, KFMRA had no objection to the import of chilled meat into Hong Kong. However, Government should tackle the many problems and malpractice relating to chilled meat. For example, it was difficult for customers to distinguish between chilled meat and fresh meat, and some unscrupulous retailers bought chilled meat at a low price and sold it as fresh meat at a much higher price.

11. Mr LAU said that KFMRA considered that Government must not sacrifice customers' interest while upholding the principle of free trade. KFMRA suggested introducing a prior approval system for chilled meat to be imported into Hong Kong, and requiring all consignments to be collected at a Central Delivery Point for quarantine.

12. Mr LAU further said that Government should consider issuing a separate licence for the sale of chilled meat.

Yuen Long Fresh Meat Association

13. Mr MOK Yiu-nam, representative of the Association, urged the Administration to tighten the control of chilled meat, such as chilled pork from Thailand. He said that at present chilled meat consignments were released for sale right away after delivery to Hong Kong by plane, and it was difficult to trace their origin if problems were subsequently found with the meat at the retail level. He also queried the use of the term "chilled meat", as any meat which was not fresh meat should be subject to the same hygiene requirements as those for frozen meat.

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Federation of Hong Kong Kowloon New Territories Hawker Associations

14. Mr FUNG Mun-hong, representative of the Federation, said that while the Mainland's abolition of the export quota control of chilled meat was inevitable, the policy would have great adverse impact on the local meat industry. He urged the Administration to step up inspection of all fresh provision shops and meat stalls, to ensure that they complied with the new requirements and conditions introduced last year for the sale of chilled meat. He said that since most markets did not have air-conditioning, meat stalls selling chilled meat without refrigerators would pose health hazard to consumers.

Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants Association

15. Mr WONG Kam-yiu, representative of the Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants Association, agreed with the other deputations that the term "chilled meat" was misleading. Mr WONG was of the view that the Mainland should also abolish its export quota control over live chickens supplied to Hong Kong to enhance consumers' choice of chickens. He pointed out that under the current export quota system for live chickens, consumers had to pay about \$5 more for each chicken. He suggested for equity purpose, Government should also discuss with the Mainland authorities about the lifting of export quota control of live poultry for supply to Hong Kong, and that there should be a proper quarantine system in the Mainland for the live poultry to be exported to Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1036/01-02(02)]

16. Mr NG Po-wing, representative of the Association, said that the local livestock industry would be greatly affected by the lifting of the export quota of chilled meat from the Mainland. He added that it would also have impact on public health if there were inadequate quarantine measures for the chilled meat imported. He said that according to information obtained from the Internet, there was widespread foot-and-mouth disease in different provinces in Thailand. It was possible that chilled pork imported from Thailand might have been infected. He said that local breeders were worried that such imported chilled pork might have caused mutation of the foot-and-mouth disease in Hong Kong. He urged Government to introduce stringent quarantine measures for imported chilled meat to prevent mutation of such diseases in local farms.

17. To facilitate consumers in distinguishing between chilled pork and fresh pork, Mr NG suggested that Government should require all chilled pork to be packed in small quantities (e.g. 300 grams for each portion) in plastic bags, and kept in refrigerator before sale.

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Hong Kong Grazers Union

18. Mr CHAN Yu-yuk, representative of the Union, said that the local duck and geese industry had been wiped out following the Mainland's abolition of export quota for chilled ducks, geese and pigeons in 1998. He was therefore worried that the abolition of export quota for other chilled meat would have the same destructive effect on the relevant local industries. He believed that chilled meat would gradually dominate the market because of its cheaper price.

19. Mr CHAN criticised Government for not providing assistance to the local farming industry, which had shrunk as a result of new measures introduced, such as the environmental protection measures, which had incurred extra costs to the industry. He considered that the local farming industry would be forced out of business, if Government still did not provide support and assistance for them.

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association

20. Mr WONG Wai-chuen, representative of the Association, expressed support for the proposal of a Central Delivery Point, which could be the Western Slaughterhouse, for collection and inspection of imported chilled meat. He believed that this would enhance the monitoring of the supply of chilled meat and its hygiene conditions. He was also in support of the suggestion that frozen chickens should have the heads and claws removed to facilitate differentiation from fresh chickens.

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association

21. Mr TSUI Ming-tuen, representative of the Association, said that he supported the suggestions that frozen and chilled chickens should have the heads and claws removed, and that a Central Delivery Point should be provided to prevent smuggling of chilled chickens.

Advisory Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

22. Mr HUI Hon-man, member of the Advisory Committee, said that he represented the sector of live poultry on the Advisory Committee. He pointed out that chilled chickens had already taken up a large share of Hong Kong market, and he believed that the abolition of the Mainland's export quota control for chilled chickens would not make significant impact on the trade.

23. However, Mr HUI considered that there had been a decline in the quality of chickens consumed in Hong Kong because of the increased supply of chilled chickens. He said that it was a great pity that Hong Kong did not take advantage of the abundant supply of different species of live chickens in the Mainland. He suggested that Government should discuss with the Mainland to enable traders to select the different

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species of live poultry they liked to buy from the Mainland farms, in order to maintain Hong Kong's reputation as a gourmet paradise.

The Federation of Pig Raising Co-operative Societies of Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories

24. Mr CHAN Kin-yip, representative of the Federation, suggested that -
- (a) there should be a Central Delivery Point where quarantine procedures for chilled meat could be conducted;
 - (b) there should be separate licences for the sale of fresh meat and chilled meat; and
 - (c) Government should set up a working group to examine the impact on the trade, and to explore ways to assist the people displaced by the change to find other jobs.

Hong Kong Retail Management Association (HKRMA)
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1036/01-02(03)]

25. Referring to the submission, Mr Logan Taylor said that HKRMA welcomed the Mainland's decision to abolish the export quota for chilled chicken, pork and other meats to be exported to Hong Kong. HKRMA urged Government to facilitate such supply to Hong Kong as this would benefit Hong Kong consumers in terms of choice, health, food safety and consumer prices. He said that HKRMA supported Government's position as outlined in its paper for this meeting, as such measures were a fair and balanced approach. He added that HKRMA urged the Legislative Council to support Government's position on this matter.

26. Mr Taylor said that as chilled meat was already being imported into Hong Kong from Australia, Thailand and other countries, HKRMA saw no reasons to discriminate against chilled meat imports from the Mainland. As Hong Kong did not have central slaughtering facilities for chickens, the lifting of Mainland's export quota of chilled chicken would allow chicken slaughtering to take place farther away from Hong Kong, and alleviate the intermingling of human and bird population which had led to the outbreak of avian flu in Hong Kong. Mr Taylor further said that it would also enhance consumers' choice and lower the price of chilled meat.

27. With reference to paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, Mr Taylor sought clarification on whether "a new source" was defined as a 'country' or a 'meat plant' or a 'farm'. He said that assuming that the assessment by Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) referred to a major meat producing plant or supplier, HKRMA supported the assessment procedure and hoped the approval process could start as early as possible. He further said that HKRMA considered that FEHD should

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concentrate on the major producers first, taking advice from the Mainland authorities and from the HKRMA members on the priority of sources to be assessed. He added that FEHD should provide sufficient resources to enable imports of chilled meat from the Mainland to take place as early as possible.

Discussion with deputations

Central Delivery Point

28. Mr Tommy CHEUNG invited views from the representatives of the retail sector on the suggestion of removing the heads and claws of chilled chickens. Mr WONG Wai-chuen from the Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association said that this could facilitate differentiation between fresh chickens and chilled chickens, but consumers would prefer buying fresh chickens for their better taste and quality. Mr Henry Nelson from HKRMA held the view that removal of the heads and claws of chilled chickens would not bring any real benefit from the retailer's point of view.

29. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked the deputations whether they would accept the lifting of export quota control over chilled meat if the Administration agreed to provide a Central Delivery Point to strengthen quarantine measures for imported chilled meat, and to require all chilled chickens to have the heads and claws removed. Mr KWAN Wing-kin from the New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited responded that he would welcome these measures as these would help customers to differentiate between chilled chickens and fresh chickens, and improve the quality assurance of imported meat.

30. Mr Alex TAM from Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association also considered that providing a Central Delivery Point in Hong Kong for handling chilled meat would reduce smuggling of chilled meat. He pointed out that only about 15% of the pork consumed in Hong Kong were from local farms, and 85% of the pork consumed in Hong Kong was chilled pork coming from the Mainland or other countries.

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31. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong sought the views of the representatives of the retail and wholesale sectors on the suggestion of setting up a Central Delivery Point in Hong Kong for collection and inspection of all imported chilled meat. Mr Keith Bartlett from HKRMA replied that it might be a good idea for some parts of the trade but not for supermarkets or other retail outlets. He explained that at present chickens or pork from the Mainland could be delivered to retail shops within one hour. If such meat had to be delivered to a Central Delivery Point in the first instance for inspection and checking, this might make the chickens and pork less fresh when they were subsequently transported to the retail outlets. He considered such arrangements unnecessary and difficult to administer.

32. Mr WONG Yung-kan pointed out that currently live chickens were inspected at the wholesale market. He asked why Mr Bartlett considered a Central Delivery Point for chilled meat not workable. Mr Bartlett said that live meat and chilled meat were two different issues. He pointed out that large retail companies had adequate resources and facilities to ensure fast, hygienic handling of chilled meat for direct delivery to their shops, and it was not necessary to go through the central facilities.

33. The Chairman asked about the current situation regarding the sale of fresh, chilled and frozen meat at the two largest chain supermarkets in Hong Kong, Wellcome and Parknshop.

34. Mr Henry Nelson said that both freshly slaughtered pork and chilled pork were sold in some Wellcome outlets. He said that the two different kinds of pork were placed at separate locations in the shops and were clearly identifiable as fresh or chilled meat.

35. Mr Keith Bartlett said that Parknshop outlets sold both freshly slaughtered pork and chilled pork from countries like Australia, and from registered farms in the Mainland. The meats were delivered and sold at the outlets in accordance with FEHD storage temperature requirements.

36. Mr MOK Yiu-nam from KFMRA said that the trade had urged for the issue of separate licences for the sale of fresh pork and chilled pork, in order to ensure that retailers selling chilled meat must provide refrigerators for the storage and display of such meat. He said that without refrigeration, chilled meat would go bad in three hours. Mr Alex TAM from Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association expressed support.

37. Mr KWOK Chi-yau from the Mutual Aid Association said that the Administration's estimation of about 14 000 members of the trade would be affected by Mainland's change in export policy was misleading. Referring to his submission, Mr KWOK said that official data had shown that there were 1 047 licences issued for poultry farms and 87 applications for such licence being processed. He said that the number of members of the trade therefore could not be just 14 000. He expressed

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dissatisfaction that whilst the trade had tried hard by making continuous investments to meet the land use and sewage discharge requirements, the Administration now agreed to import more chilled meat from the Mainland, which would have adverse impact on the trade.

38. Mr Alex TAM from Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association said that they did not oppose to the import of chilled meat, but it was important to enable consumers to differentiate between fresh meat and chilled meat, so that the fresh meat industry could survive. He believed that far more than 14 000 people in the fresh meat industry would be affected.

Discussion with the Administration

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1020/01-02(01)]

39. Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food (A) (DS(EF)(A)) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper. She said that Hong Kong had long adopted a free trade policy and this would not be changed. She further said that no goods or commodities were subject to any import or export quota in the territory. However, all foods were allowed to be imported only if they met and complied with Hong Kong's stringent hygiene requirements, which were formulated with reference to international standards.

40. DS(EF)(A) also clarified that Hong Kong was notified on 17 December 2001 that effective from 1 January 2001, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Mainland would no longer implement any export quota control over chilled chickens, pork or beef for supply to Hong Kong. As the notification did not contain details, the Administration had contacted the relevant departments in the Mainland, and took the opportunity of the half-yearly meeting between Hong Kong and Mainland food and food animals inspection and quarantine authorities in mid January 2002 to explain to the Mainland authorities Hong Kong's hygiene requirements for imported meat. DS(EF)(A) said that no chilled meat had yet been imported into Hong Kong from the Mainland following its announcement on abolition of export quota control over the supply of chilled meat for Hong Kong. She added that agreement had been reached with the Mainland authorities that before the implementation details were worked out, no chilled meat would be imported from the Mainland. DS(EF)(A) said that the Administration understood that the change would have an impact on the trade. Therefore, AFCD and FEHD had started discussions with the trade on ways to cope with the new situation.

41. Deputy Director (Food & Public Health) (DD(F&PH)) of FEHD briefed members on the control measures for the import and the sale of chilled meat, as detailed in paragraphs 4 to 8 of the Administration's paper. As regards the meaning of "a new source" as raised by Mr Taylor of HKRMA (paragraph 27 refers), Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control) (AD(FS&C)) of FEHD explained that it included the exporting country and the type of food product.

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42. On the use of the term "chilled meat", DS(EF)(A) clarified that it was used internationally and was not coined by the Administration. AD(FS&C) added that there were yet no standardised Chinese translation for "frozen meat" and "chilled meat", and the common ones were "冰鮮" for "chilled", and "急凍" or "冷藏" for "frozen". She explained that the main difference was that "chilled meat" should be kept at temperature between 0°C to 4°C, while "frozen meat" or below -18°C. AD(FS&C) further said that according to existing legislation, defrosting of frozen chickens had to be conducted at licensed food factories, and for defrosted chickens which were pre-packaged, the label should clearly show that they had been defrosted.

43. Assistant Director (Operation) 3 (AD(O)3) of FEHD said that the department had informed members of the trade of the new requirements and conditions for the sale of chilled meat in June 2001. FEHD had stepped up inspections of the retail outlets since the requirements had come into effect on 24 September 2001. She said that 70% of the fresh provision shops (FPSs) and market stalls selling chilled meat had already installed refrigerators for the storage or display of chilled meat for sale. However, some 20 outlets were found not complying with the new requirements and conditions. She said that FEHD had also conducted surprise inspections to check on FPSs and market stalls and collected information from the trade. FEHD's enforcement action would target at those problematic FPSs and market stalls, for which a list had been compiled. She informed members that some six or seven unlicensed chilled meat distribution centres had been cracked down in previous years, and one more such centre had been uncovered after September 2001.

44. In response to the Chairman, AD(FS&C) said that no chilled pork or beef had ever been exported from the Mainland to Hong Kong in the past 40 years. Chilled chickens had been exported to Hong Kong between mid 1980s to early 1998, subject to export quota and the sole agent system in Hong Kong. AD(FS&C) explained that with the lifting of Mainland's export quota for chilled meat, chilled chickens would no longer be subject to restrictions such as the granting of export business operating right and the sole agency system.

Control measures for future imports of chilled meat from the Mainland

45. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed concern about the safety standard of chilled meat from the Mainland after the abolition of the sole agency system. He asked whether the Administration would require that only those registered farms and food processing plants in the Mainland could export meat to Hong Kong, in order to safeguard the hygiene standard of such imports.

46. DD(F&PH) responded that the Mainland authorities were also concerned about the hygiene/safety standard of meat supplied to Hong Kong. She pointed out that the Mainland also had a registration and inspection system for farms and food processing plants to ensure that they met the necessary food safety and hygiene requirements. She

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said that FEHD had informed the Mainland authorities of Hong Kong's import requirements for chilled meat. FEHD might also conduct inspections to the relevant farms and processing plants in the Mainland to see whether they met the requirements of Hong Kong.

47. DD(F&PH) further said that a lot of preparatory work had to be done, including dovetailing the implementation arrangements of the Mainland and Hong Kong. Both sides had therefore agreed that the Mainland would not export chilled meat (chickens, pork or beef) to Hong Kong pending finalisation of the arrangements.

48. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the future quarantine procedures would include inspecting chemical residues in the chilled meat imported from the Mainland. AD(FS&C) responded that the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Chemical Residues) Regulation recently passed by the Legislative Council imposed control on the feeding of drugs and chemicals to food animals. She confirmed that corresponding amendment had also been made to the relevant legislation governing the presence of harmful substances in food.

49. Dr LO Wing-lok asked whether FEHD would treat the Mainland as "one source" for the purpose of the assessment procedures for trial shipments. He also asked if the Administration planned to inspect all the farms, in every province, city and county, in the Mainland. DD(F&PH) replied that due to limited manpower resources, it would not be possible for FEHD to inspect all the farms in the Mainland eligible for exporting meat to Hong Kong. She said that such inspections would be conducted on a selective or random basis, and essentially serve as compliance checks.

50. The Chairman commented that random checks might not be adequate to cover all farms or food production plants in the Mainland after the lifting of the export quota for chilled meat. He suggested that FEHD should make an effort to inspect all registered farms which were exporting meat to Hong Kong for the first time.

51. Dr LO said that some countries required the exporting countries to bear the costs for inspection. He asked whether Hong Kong would adopt the same practice. DD(F&PH) responded that as these compliance inspections were to ensure that such import met Hong Kong's hygiene requirements, FEHD had to make the necessary arrangements, including staff deployment.

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52. Dr LO remained of the view that the inspection/quarantine costs should not be borne by Hong Kong taxpayers. He said that in some overseas countries, a producer of health food or medicine had to pay an application fee for exporting his products to another country, and such fee included the costs of the first inspection taken by the importing country.

53. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that as the Administration played the 'watchdog' role in ensuring food safety, it must devise adequate control measures for the import of meat from the Mainland. He considered that it would be difficult for the Administration to impose control on the farms or processing plants on the Mainland. Moreover, a great number of registered farms or processing plants might be permitted to supply chilled meat to Hong Kong after 1 January 2002. He believed that the Administration could only strengthen regulatory control at source, i.e. at the import level. In this connection, Mr CHEUNG queried whether the present control measure of inspecting only six consignments of meat imported from a new source was adequate.

54. AD(FS&C) responded that any farm and food production plant in the Mainland which wanted to supply chilled meat to Hong Kong would require registration by the Mainland authorities and by FEHD as well. The purpose of the registration system was to safeguard the hygiene standards of those farms and processing plants, and the criteria for registration by FEHD were set out in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper. She said that FEHD officers would also conduct on-site inspections to the farms or food production plants concerned, and also exchange views with the Mainland authorities on their requirements and standards.

55. AD(FS&C) further explained that after these assessment procedures, FEHD would conduct the "three-plus-three" examination to the first six trial consignments of chilled meat imported into Hong Kong from the Mainland. If FEHD was satisfied with the test results of the first six consignments, subsequent consignments would be put under FEHD's regular food surveillance system. FEHD would pay follow-up visits to the registered farm or food production plant in the Mainland to see whether they had raised their standards to meet any new requirements coming into force from time to time. DS(EF)(A) stressed that all foods allowed to be imported must meet and comply with the stringent hygiene requirements in Hong Kong which were formulated with reference to international standards and practice.

56. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that it was most important for the Administration to introduce adequate measures to ensure the hygiene standard of the chilled meat to be imported from the Mainland. He requested the Administration to consider the following when working out the quarantine arrangements -

- (a) the need for FEHD to conduct inspection to each farm or food production plant in the Mainland which had applied for registration with FEHD; and

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- (b) to need to conduct surprise inspections on such farms/food production plant and draw up a checklist of inspection items.

57. AD(FS&C) assured members that FEHD would not rubber-stamp registrations of farms or production plants. She said that FEHD would conduct investigation to these farms or plants before and after the registration. Moreover, FEHD officers would also pay visits to their Mainland counterparts to see whether the same stringent hygiene standards were applied in the Mainland as those in Hong Kong. If all such standards were complied with, FEHD would only conduct random checks periodically on these farms or plants. She said that in line with the international practice such as that in North America, EU, Australia and New Zealand, only the standards of the recognised authorities would be assessed.

Provision of a Central Delivery Point

58. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked about the Administration's position on the suggestion of providing a Central Delivery Point in Hong Kong for handling and inspection of chilled meat. He also asked how the Administration would ensure that the facilities of large-scale retailing companies met the same standards as that of a Central Delivery Point.

59. DS(EF)(A) responded that the Administration would need to further examine the possible impact of providing a Central Delivery Point, such as whether it would create restrictions on free trade. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong requested that the Administration should examine the pros and cons, the costs and feasibility of providing a Central Delivery Point in Hong Kong, and whether any labelling system should be introduced to facilitate differentiation between fresh and chilled chickens. He stressed that it was most important to put in place a sound quarantine system to ensure the safety of chilled meat to be imported to Hong Kong. DS(EF)(A) noted Mr CHEUNG's suggestion.

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Assessment of the impact on the trade

60. Mr WONG Yung-kan and Mr Tommy CHEUNG urged the Administration to conduct an assessment on the impact of Mainland's abolition of export quota for chilled meat supplied to Hong Kong on the local meat industries and related trades (such as breeders, retailers, wholesalers, transport, slaughtering and poultry feed industries). DS(EF)(A) assured members that the Administration would make its best efforts to ensure the safety and hygiene standard of food for sale in Hong Kong. She further said that the Administration would conduct further studies to assess the impact on relevant industries, and the magnitude of such impact would depend on how receptive the public was towards chilled meat, and the quantities of chilled meat to be imported from the Mainland. According to the Administration's initial assessment, there were a total of about 14 000 persons involved in the trades.

Action

61. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked what assistance the Administration would provide to help the 14 000 members of the trade affected by the change. He said that the local farming industry was actually progressing, for example, some farmers were planning to plant aloe. He asked whether the Administration would draw up a comprehensive agricultural policy for Hong Kong.

62. Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DD(AFC)) of AFCD responded that AFCD sought to enhance the competitiveness of farmers and to develop a diversified range of agricultural products. He said that for livestock farmers, AFCD had tried to reduce their production costs so that they could compete with imported items. For crop farmers, DD(AFC) said that AFCD had helped them develop alternative options of farming such as organic farming and greenhouse farming. He said that AFCD would continue to explore suitable options of farming in collaboration with the industry.

Separate licences for the sale of fresh meat and chilled meat

63. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed reservations about the suggestion of issuing separate licences for the sale of fresh meat and chilled meat as there were already too many different types of licences. He considered it more important to step up monitoring and control of the chilled meat from the Mainland to ensure the hygiene standard of such meat.

Enabling consumers to differentiate between fresh meat and chilled meat

64. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for introducing measures to enable consumers to differentiate between chilled chickens and fresh chickens in order to protect consumers' interest.

Consultation with the trade and timeframe for working out implementation details

65. Mr Tommy CHEUNG urged the Administration to discuss with the trade when formulating the implementation details. He also asked about the timeframe for working out the implementation plan. DS(EF)(A) responded that AFCD and FEHD had been discussing with the trade on this matter. As a lot of preparatory work had yet to be done, it would take some time for the implementation details to be worked out.

Action

Conclusion

66. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that members were in support of the policy to provide greater choice for customers and to ensure the safety/quality of imported food. He stressed that it was necessary to enable consumers to differentiate between chilled meat and fresh meat, and to ensure the hygiene standard of chilled meat imported to Hong Kong. He urged the Administration to put in place an efficient, safe and open quarantine system for chilled meat.

Clerk

67. The Chairman requested the Clerk to compile a list of the concerns expressed by the deputations and Panel members, and forward it to the Administration for a written response.

(Post-meeting note : A list of concerns raised by deputations and Panel members was forwarded to the Administration on 11 February 2002. The Administration's response is awaited.)

68. The Chairman thanked the representatives of the deputations for attending the meeting.

69. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:35 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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