

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2) 217/02-03
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of meeting
on Monday, 16 September 2002 at 10:45 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)
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
- Member Attending** : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
- Members Absent** : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
- Public Officers Attending** : Items II to IV
Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Edward LAW
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) 2
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr M K CHEUNG
Assistant Director (Fisheries)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr S F LEUNG
Senior Fisheries Officer (Fisheries Management)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr WANG Yong-hong, Henry
Binhai Wastewater Treatment & Disposal (Hong Kong)
Consultant Limited

Item V

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG
Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Ms Priscilla TO
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental
Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

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

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

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. Confirmation of minutes of meetings

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2675/01-02, CB(2)2764/01-02 and CB(2)2765/01-02)

The minutes of the special meetings on 28 March and 14 May 2002 and the regular meeting on 24 June 2002 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2769/01-02(01) and (02))

2. The Chairman informed members that the first meeting of the Panel in the next legislative session would be held on 10 October 2002 for the election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman. He asked whether members wished to have a further meeting before 10 October 2002. At the suggestion of Mr WONG Yung-kan, members agreed to hold a special meeting on 2 October 2002 to meet with deputations from sectors and organisations concerned and listen to their views on -

- (a) the findings of the consultancy study on the feasibility of developing an offshore fishing industry in Hong Kong; and
- (b) the importation of chilled chickens from the Mainland.

III. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(2)2632/01-02(03))

3. Members noted that the Administration had provided an information paper on the method of calculating the estimated loss of the live chicken trade (wholesalers/retailers/transporters) if an additional "rest day" was introduced.

IV. Consultancy study on the feasibility of developing an offshore fishing industry in Hong Kong

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 2769/01-02(03))

4. At the Chairman's invitation, Mr Henry WANG from Binhai Wastewater Treatment & Disposal (Hong Kong) Consultant Limited gave a Powerpoint presentation on the findings of the consultancy study, highlighting the following areas as detailed in the consultancy report and its executive summary -

- (a) Background of the study and problems faced by Hong Kong fishermen;
- (b) Overview of offshore fisheries in the world;
- (c) Identification of potential fisheries resources and fishing grounds;

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- (d) Assessment of the technical and financial feasibility for Hong Kong fishermen to venture into offshore fishing; and
- (e) Options for immediate, medium and long-term development.

5. Acting Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)(Ag)) said that to follow up the report, the Administration would brief the local fishing community about the findings including the recommended offshore fisheries options and actions required to be taken by fishermen. She said that the Administration would continue to provide assistance to help interested fishermen venture into offshore fishing through technical support services and credit facilities. DS(FEH)(Ag) further said that the Administration had started providing fishermen with training courses on offshore fishing. In addition, the Administration would liaise with the Mainland and foreign government agencies to collect necessary information on offshore fishing operations where necessary.

Discussion

6. Mr WONG Yung-kan declared that he was the chairman of the Joint Committee of Hong Kong Fishermen's Organisations which had made a written submission to the Panel on this subject. He criticised that the study had dragged on for an unreasonably long period of three years and this had much delayed the development of the fishing industry.

7. Mr WONG welcomed the conclusion in the report that it was feasible for Hong Kong fishermen to venture into offshore fishing. However, he pointed out that the recommended options for immediate development, that was, to acquire the necessary fishing vessels through modification of existing Hong Kong fishing vessels, were completely outdated. He said that the fishing community actually targeted at high-priced and profitable fish catches which were suitable for the sashimi market. However, the consultant's recommendation of modifying existing Hong Kong fishing vessels would only be suitable for fish catches used for canneries, and such catches could only be sold at a lower price (i.e. USD1,500 per tonne). He pointed out that according to the international requirement, ultra-low temperature (ULT) tuna longliners installed with freezing equipment (preservation at -60°C) were required for fishing and preserving tuna for sashimi. These catches could be sold for some USD5,000 per tonne. Mr WONG further said that two Hong Kong fishing vessels had already started offshore fishing in Samoa. It was therefore unacceptable for the consultant to recommend at the present stage that the local fishing community should target at fish catches which were only suitable for canneries. Mr WONG also expressed grave doubt on the recommendation that current large local wooden vessels were appropriate for longlining bottom fish in Nansha. He said that advanced equipment would be required to ensure navigational safety in offshore fishing.

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8. DS(FEH)(Ag) responded that the purpose of the consultancy study was to recommend feasible options for fishermen who wanted to pursue offshore fishing. She explained that the study findings were only to serve as reference by fishermen who were free to formulate their own strategy suitable to them. She pointed out that the consultant had recommended a number of options. The fishermen could consider investing on a bigger scale in pursuing offshore fishing taking into account their own circumstances.

9. Assistant Director (Fisheries) (AD(F)) said that the study had recommended different options for immediate, medium and long-term development of offshore fishing, as well as strategies for implementation. He said that fishermen would have to make a commercial decision as to which option they should adopt and the scale of investment they could make having regard to the risks involved. He agreed that safety of fishing vessels was most important and not all the existing Hong Kong fishing vessels were suitable for conversion into vessels for offshore fishing. He said that fishermen should employ qualified ship engineers to certify suitability of their vessels for modification. AD(F) further said that whether fish catches were suitable to be used for sashimi or canning depended on the fish species and freshness of the catches. It was therefore also possible for fishing vessels without ULT freezing equipment to be used for catching fish for the sashimi market, if the vessels had a short turn-around and cruising time.

10. Mr Henry WANG supplemented that very few existing Hong Kong vessels were suitable for modification, as the age of fishing vessels which could be converted should not exceed five years. He further said that the consultant did not recommend modification below the deck or turning a small vessel into a big one as these would be dangerous. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked why the consultant had still recommended modification of fishing vessels giving such limitations of existing Hong Kong vessels.

11. Mr Henry WANG responded that there were actually a number of options recommended in the report. The required vessels could be acquired through modification, construction of new fishing vessels or purchase of second-hand vessels. He said that fishermen should make their own decisions taking into account their affordability and circumstances.

12. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that fishermen needed to borrow loans from Government to finance their construction of new fishing vessels in order to pursue offshore fishing. He pointed out that all along Hong Kong fishermen had a good record of loan repayment. He said that as offshore fishing had proven to be profitable, the Government should consider providing loans or even grants for Hong Kong fishermen to help them venture into offshore fishing. He pointed out that there were only \$20 million left in the Fisheries Development Loan Fund (FDLF), and the Administration should consider injecting more capital into the Fund.

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13. DS(FEH)(Ag) responded that fishermen could borrow from FDLF or Fish Marketing Organisation Loan Fund, subject to their meeting the criteria for such loans and the availability of funds. She said that currently the Administration did not have plans to inject more funds to the FDLF. She further said the Administration was of the view that offshore fishing was a kind of commercial operation and it would not encourage fishermen to totally rely on FDLF for construction of new vessels for offshore fishing.

14. In response to the Chairman, DS(FEH)(Ag) said that as the consultancy study had pointed out, Hong Kong fishermen should adopt a commercial business approach in pursuing offshore fishing rather than continuing the traditional family-based operation. It was because offshore fishing entailed large-scale investment and it was necessary to formulate a comprehensive business plan on the investment, marketing, operational and financing strategies, etc.

15. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed the consultancy report which revealed that Hong Kong fishermen would have to pursue offshore fishing in the long-term in view of the decreasing fisheries resources in the traditional fishing grounds. However, he found that some of the consultant's recommendations were difficult to implement unless with the support of the Government. For example, as the consultant had pointed out, the cost of constructing a new vessel for fishing tunas in the Indian and Pacific Oceans was about HK\$3.6 million, whereas the cost of constructing a new ULT longliner was in the range of HK\$13.5 million to \$23.5 million. He said that given the economic downturn, the high costs might make it difficult for Hong Kong fishermen to pursue offshore fishing. He considered that the Government should review the existing fisheries loan schemes and provide loans for Hong Kong fishermen to acquire new fishing vessels. The Government should also assist in providing training for fishermen in order to upgrade the operation of the industry, and to attract new entrants to the industry.

16. DS(FEH)(Ag) responded that one of the immediate development options recommended in the consultancy report was that small ice-chilled tuna longliners could be acquired through modification of suitable existing Hong Kong fishing vessels at about HK\$0.54 million, or by purchasing second-hand or constructing new vessels. As regards the financing of offshore fishing operation, DS(FEH)(Ag) said that interested fishermen could apply for loans from banks. She further said that other industries also had to raise capital to finance the new investments required for their transformation. In this regard, Government would have to balance the interests of different sectors of the community in the overall allocation of public resources.

17. Referring to the four recommended options for immediate development detailed in paragraph 7.1 in the executive summary, Dr LO Wing-lok asked about the respective numbers of fishing vessels which were already practising the four recommended options, as well as the investments involved and the number of jobs created.

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18. AD(F) responded that before the consultancy report was published, some Hong Kong fishermen had started fishing outside the traditional fishing grounds, and many had gone to fishing in Nansha. He pointed out that the Mainland had offered a quota of 150 permits for fishing vessels to fish in Nansha and about 130 permits had been taken up. Members of these fishing crew were mostly employees hired from the Mainland. He said that as far as the Administration was aware, there were only two fishing vessels which had started fishing in Samoa and most Hong Kong fishermen had not yet ventured into offshore fishing in other fishing grounds. In response to Dr LO, AD(F) said that there were fisheries companies which had expressed interest in seeking cooperation or joint venture with local fishermen to pursue offshore fishing.

19. Mr WONG Yung-kan criticised the Administration for rendering little financial support and assistance for the development of offshore fishing. He said that in contrast, a Special Finance Scheme had been set up for the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). He urged that the Administration should also provide loans to fishermen to assist them in pursuing offshore fishing.

20. DS(FEH)(Ag) reiterated that the Administration had to carefully balance the interests of the fisheries industry, that of other industries and that of the community as a whole. She pointed out that SMEs covered a wide scope of industries, and Hong Kong fishermen might also be eligible for loans under the SMEs funding schemes. She added that as the report had pointed out, a commercial business approach was necessary for pursuing offshore fishing, and fishermen had to draw up business plans for their investment. They could also seek to cooperate with overseas fisheries companies for investment, and resort to commercial financing as provided by banks and finance companies.

21. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's lack of support to fishermen. He said that fisheries companies had so far not offered any concrete proposals for cooperation with local fishermen, and these companies had not committed to making investments in offshore fishing.

22. Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that the Administration should actively consider providing financial assistance and training to fishermen in order to implement the development options recommended in the consultancy report.

23. The Chairman suggested that the Administration should provide a report on its discussion with the local fisheries community on the consultancy findings. DS(FEH)(Ag) agreed.

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24. Mr WONG Yung-kan suggested that the fisheries industries should be invited to give views to the Panel on the consultancy report at the special meeting scheduled for 2 October 2002. Members agreed.

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V. Importation of chilled chickens from the Mainland

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 2769/01-02(04) , (05) and (06))

25. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) briefed members on the Administration's paper which gave details on the following -

- (a) the inspection and quarantine requirements and arrangements for chilled chickens imported into Hong Kong from the Mainland; and
- (b) the new licensing requirements for the sale of chilled chickens at retail outlets in Hong Kong.

He said that the Administration had also provided a written response to the issues raised by the deputations at the Panel meeting on 1 February 2002.

26. With the aid of video presentation, the Administration highlighted the inspection and quarantine requirements/arrangements for Mainland chilled chickens.

27. DFEH stressed that the Administration attached great importance to the hygiene standards of the Mainland chilled chickens to be imported to Hong Kong. He said that a label with a security hologram printed with "CIQ" would be stuck onto each chilled chicken imported from the Mainland to show that the chicken had been approved for export to Hong Kong by the Mainland's inspection and quarantine authority. A specially allocated number would be printed on the back of each hologram label to facilitate the tracing of the processing plant and the farm.

28. Referring to the list of the draft additional licensing/tenancy conditions at Annex 2 to the Administration's paper, Assistant Director (Operations) 3 (AD(O)3) said that the list had incorporated the comments of the poultry trade as far as possible.

Discussion

29. Mr Michael MAK raised the following questions -

- (a) why the Mainland ceased to export chilled chickens to Hong Kong in early 1998;
- (b) whether the Administration had any plan to cease the supply of live chickens in Hong Kong;
- (c) whether the importation of chilled chickens was a measure to totally eliminate the recurrence of avian influenza in Hong Kong; and
- (d) what measures would be taken to forestall fake hologram labels and the sticking of such labels onto chilled chickens from unlawful sources.

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30. DFEH provided the following response -

- (a) chilled chickens had been exported from the Mainland to Hong Kong since the 1980s until the end of 1997. It was suspended voluntarily by the Mainland in early 1998;
- (b) the Administration did not have any plan to stop the supply of live chickens in Hong Kong, and the import of chilled chickens was only to provide more choices for Hong Kong people;
- (c) the import of chilled chickens was not a measure taken by the Administration and it was the Mainland's decision to resume supply of chilled chickens to Hong Kong; and
- (d) the hologram labels would be issued by the State General Administration for Quality Supervision and Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) of the Mainland, and Hong Kong would strengthen inspections of these hologram labels and publicity to enhance consumers' knowledge of these labels.

31. The Chairman asked about the estimated price difference between live chickens and the Mainland chilled chickens. DFEH responded that the setting of retail price was basically a commercial decision. While the poultry trade estimated that the Mainland chilled chickens would be cheaper than live chickens, it was difficult to estimate what the price difference would be.

Inspection and quarantine requirements and arrangements for Mainland chilled chickens

32. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that poultry trade was not opposed to the importation of chilled chickens from the Mainland, but was concerned that the sale of these chickens should be subject to proper control. Mr WONG raised the following questions in respect of the importation arrangements -

- (a) what measures the Administration would take to ensure the quality of the subsequent consignments of chilled chickens imported into Hong Kong after the first six consignments for trial shipments;
- (b) what measures would be introduced to facilitate consumers to differentiate between genuine and fake hologram labels; and
- (c) whether effective enforcement could be taken on the requirement that chilled chickens should be individually packaged for sale.

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33. DFEH responded that the chilled chickens for export to Hong Kong must come from farms and processing plants registered with the Mainland's inspection and quarantine authority, and these farms/plants were subject to requirements imposed by the Mainland's authority. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) would also ensure the health of the chickens by conducting inspections of the export farms. He explained that to ensure that the facilities and hygiene standards of processing plants complied with Hong Kong's requirements, only processing plants with the prior approval of FEHD could export chilled chickens to Hong Kong. He said that FEHD had started to inspect the registered processing plants which intended to export chilled chickens to Hong Kong.

34. DFEH further said that consumers should be able to differentiate between freshly slaughtered chickens and chilled chickens by taste, the colour of the cut at throat, temperature of the carcass and the clarity of the chicken's eyes. He said that the Administration would step up publicity regarding how to differentiate chilled chickens from freshly slaughtered chickens. In addition, the Administration would strengthen inspections to prevent the use of fake hologram labels and to ensure stringent compliance with the new licensing conditions for selling chilled chickens.

35. Mr WONG Yung-kan considered that the Administration should also impose heavy penalty on those who breached the new licensing conditions in the future. The Chairman said that members were most concerned about ways to prevent retailers selling chilled chickens as freshly slaughtered chickens. He added that it was easy for a retailer to raise the temperature of chilled chickens by soaking them in hot water. Dr YEUNG Sum said that it was important for the Administration to take adequate measures to safeguard consumers' interest and ensure effective enforcement of the additional licensing conditions at retail outlets.

Adm 36. DFEH noted members' concerns. He reiterated that the Administration would step up publicity to enhance consumers' knowledge and would increase inspections to ensure compliance with the licensing conditions for the sale of chilled chickens.

37. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether there was any requirement in respect of the water supply for the Mainland farms/processing plants exporting chilled chickens to Hong Kong. He considered that underground water or well water, which was often polluted, should be forbidden to be used by these farms/processing plants for feeding or processing chickens. Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control) (AD(FSC)) replied that all those export farms and processing plants registered with the Mainland's inspection and quarantine authority were required to use water from authorised sources and the water must be fit for human consumption. Farms or processing plants failing to comply with this requirement would not be allowed to export chilled chickens to Hong Kong.

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38. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether these export farms and processing plants were only allowed to use tap water for feeding or processing chickens. AD(FSC) replied that some farms or processing plants located in rural area might not be provided with tap water. She said that what was more important was that the water supply had to be certified by the relevant Mainland authority to be fit for human consumption and free from pollution.

39. Mr WONG Sing-chi asked whether the Administration would continue to conduct regular inspections to the processing plants, after it had been approved to export chilled chickens to Hong Kong, to ensure that its hygiene standards met Hong Kong's requirements. Mr WONG also asked what follow-up actions the Administration would take to deal with processing plants found producing problematic chilled chickens.

40. AD(FSC) responded that all live chickens supplied to the processing plants for production of chilled chickens for export to Hong Kong must come from poultry farms registered with the various Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureaux of the Mainland. She said that Hong Kong had reached agreement with AQSIQ that only processing plants with the prior approval of FEHD could export chilled chickens to Hong Kong. She pointed out that under the Imported Game, Meat and Poultry Regulations of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), all imported game, meat and poultry must be accompanied with an official health certificate issued by a competent authority recognised by DFEH to certify that the game, meat and poultry was fit for human consumption.

41. AD(FSC) further said that in addition to regular inspections, FEHD officers would conduct unscheduled surprise inspections to the approved processing plants to ensure that they maintained a good standard of hygiene. She explained that in case of food incidents involving Mainland chilled chickens, FEHD would trace the processing plant responsible for producing such chilled chickens and conduct inspections on that plant. FEHD would also follow-up the investigation findings with the Mainland's authority. AD(FSC) added that if the food incident was serious, the findings of the investigation would also be made available to the public.

Suggestion of cutting chilled chickens' chins

42. Mr Tommy CHEUNG further said that both the chicken retailing industry and Hon Mrs Selina CHOW were in support of removal of the heads and claws of chilled chickens, whereas the catering industry had divided views on this suggestion. He asked whether the Administration would consider a new suggestion of removing the chins from chilled chickens to facilitate differentiation between chilled chickens and freshly slaughtered chickens.

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43. AD(O)3 pointed out that as there were no scientific grounds to support that removing the chins of chilled chickens was necessary for food safety and public hygiene reasons, this could not be made a mandatory requirement. DFEH added that as Hong Kong adopted a free trade policy, the Administration could not impose such a requirement as there was no scientific ground or evidence that the requirement was necessary for the protection of food safety and public hygiene. However, he agreed to convey the suggestion to the exporters on the Mainland and also to the local importers of chilled chickens, as they might be willing to adopt the suggestion.

44. Mr Tommy CHEUNG was dissatisfied with the Administration's response. He pointed out that the requirement of sticking the hologram labels onto each chilled chicken also had nothing to do with food safety and public hygiene. He said that members were concerned about measures to prevent stallholders from posing chilled chickens as freshly slaughtered chickens for sale, as it was easy to remove the package or even the label of chilled chickens. He said that the Administration should consider the suggestion of requiring all Mainland chilled chickens to have their lower jaw cut, as this suggestion had the support of both the chicken industry and the catering industry.

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG added that the chicken industry was very concerned about the impact of the import of chilled chickens to Hong Kong. According to his recent survey, many workers in the chicken farms and in the related retail, wholesale and transport sectors would lose their jobs after chilled chickens were imported to Hong Kong. He considered that the Administration should take measures to protect the interest of the chicken industry and also to safeguard consumers' right to know.

46. DFEH said that he shared members' concern about the need to differentiate chilled chickens from freshly slaughtered chickens. However, there was no international food safety standard requiring the removal of lower jaw of chilled chickens. As a member of the World Trade Organisation, Hong Kong could not impose mandatory requirements, which were not justified on grounds of food safety and public hygiene, on imported chilled chickens. Nevertheless, the Administration would liaise with the exporters and convey to them the trade's suggestions.

Packaging requirements

47. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the packaging requirements for chilled chickens would also apply to chickens which had been freshly slaughtered, but could not be sold out before the markets closed at the end of the day. He said that this was a common practice in the retail market that all chickens were slaughtered on the day before the "Rest Day", and unsold slaughtered chickens would be refrigerated for sale afterwards. AD(O)3 replied that each imported chilled chicken from the Mainland was required to be individually packaged with a firmly attached label. AD(O)3 said that all along freshly slaughtered chickens for sale at market stalls were not required to be pre-packaged, and the packaging requirements for Mainland's chilled chickens

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would not apply to the live chickens which were slaughtered and refrigerated at retail outlets.

Transportation

48. In response to Dr LO Wing-lok's enquiry about the freshness of the chilled chickens to be imported from the Mainland, AD(FSC) said that after the chickens had been slaughtered, the carcasses and offal would undergo the process of primary chilling after they had been separately processed and cleaned. The carcasses would be chilled to the temperature of 8°C or below within six hours after slaughtering. Within the first 12 hours after slaughtering, the temperature would drop to 4°C or below and remain at a level not higher than 4°C. AD(FSC) said that if everything went smooth, the chilled chickens could be delivered to Hong Kong in about six hours. She advised that if the chilling process took place too rapidly, it might cause cellular damage to a chicken and the meat might become tough. She further said that as the temperature of refrigerators in ordinary families was only from 0 to 10 °C, chilled chickens should be consumed in a few days' time and should not be stored in refrigerators for as long as five to seven days. In response to Dr LO, AD(FSC) confirmed that the chilled chickens could be delivered to Hong Kong within the same day on which they were slaughtered.

Separate shops/stalls for the sale of chilled chickens

49. Dr LO Wing-lok said that the sale of chilled chickens and live chickens should be conducted in separate shops/stalls under different licences. This would not only facilitate the control at the retail level but would also prevent cross-contamination between chilled chickens and live chickens. He further said that under the Administration's proposed arrangements, there was the risk that the shop/stall operator might come into contact with live chickens after handling the offal of chilled poultry and this would give rise to cross-contamination. Dr LO said that from the perspective of public health, chilled chickens and live chickens should be sold at different premises.

50. DFEH responded that the Administration was willing to re-consider the suggestion if the retail sector found this agreeable. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that the retail sector was opposed to the suggestion.

Use-by date

51. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked what actions the Administration would take to prevent retailers from selling chilled chickens, after expiry of their "use-by date", as freshly slaughtered chickens. DFEH responded that retailers selling chilled chickens after expiry of the "use-by date" would be subject to prosecution. It was a breach of conditions for retailers to sell chilled chickens as freshly slaughtered chickens.

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Centralised wholesale market for chilled chickens

52. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the Administration would consider putting in place a centralised wholesale market for chilled chickens. DFEH responded that with the Mainland's abolition of export quota control over chilled meat and poultry, importers in Hong Kong would be free to place orders for the import of chilled chickens from any exporter in the Mainland, subject to the health and hygiene requirements being met. He added that the Administration was of the view that designating a wholesale market for chilled chickens would not be an effective means to combat smuggling of illegal chilled chickens. The process would not add value to the supply chain and yet at the same time, increase the cost.

Impact on the local chicken industry and related sectors

53. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he had tabled the findings of his recent survey with the local chicken industry and related regarding the import of chilled chickens from the Mainland. He asked whether the Administration would agree that the importation of chilled chickens from the Mainland would have serious impact on the local live chicken industry. He also asked what assistance the Administration would render to the local chicken industry.

54. DFEH said that while he agreed that the sale volume of fresh chickens might slightly decrease, the import of chilled chickens would create new business opportunities for many people. He added that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department had been providing technical support to local farms to develop new quality chickens to enhance their attractiveness to consumers.

Conclusion

55. The Chairman said that members had expressed much concern about the means to differentiate chilled chickens from freshly slaughtered chickens. He requested the Administration to reconsider the suggestions put forward by the trade and Mr Tommy CHEUNG in this respect. As the importation of chilled chickens would start in two months, members agreed to hold a special meeting on 2 October 2002 to listen to further views from the relevant industries.

56. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:00 pm.