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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 2 June 2003 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A 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 WONG Yung-kan
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok

Member attending : Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP

Members absent : Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Public officers attending : Mr John TSANG
Head, Team Clean

Mr W H CHEUK
Deputy Head, Team Clean

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Miss Janet WONG
Director of Home Affairs

Mr Marco M H WU
Director of Buildings

Mr LAU Kai-hung
Deputy Director (Estate Management)
Housing Department

Mr C H LAM
Assistant Director of Drainage Services (Operations &
Maintenance)

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 Discussion on the Interim Report on Measures to Improve Environmental Hygiene in Hong Kong**
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2274/02-03(01), CB(2) 2296/02-03(01) and CB(2) 2301/02-03(01)]

The Chairman welcomed members of Team Clean and the Government representatives to the meeting. He said that the meeting was to discuss the short-term and longer-term measures contained in the interim report on measures to improve environmental hygiene in Hong Kong released on 28 May 2003.

The interim report on measures to improve environmental hygiene in Hong Kong

2. Head, Team Clean (H/TC) said that the interim report had set out work targets which were divided into Phases I and II. Under Phase I, there were about 70 measures which would be implemented immediately. The majority of them would be completed before August 2003. As regards Phase II, there were about 40 longer-term measures, which might involve legislative amendments or proposals. They would be developed on the basis of experience gained during Phase I, and details of their implementation would be set out in the final report to be issued by Team Clean in early August.

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3. H/TC further said that originally Team Clean had not planned to include the longer-term measures for Phase II in the interim report. However, these measures were now outlined in the report with a view to promoting public discussions and gauging public views at an early stage. H/TC said that at the present stage there was no further detail that he could provide on the longer-term measures. However, Team Clean would further consult LegCo Members on these measures when the final report was issued.

4. The Chairman said that many of the measures under Phase I were not new, for example, cleaning up environmental black spots and conducting inspections to construction sites for removal of stagnant water. He asked whether it was the intention of Team Clean to strengthen these existing measures on a long-term basis.

5. H/TC responded that measures included under Phase I were those which were enforceable under existing legislation, and these aimed at achieving quick and visible improvements to the environment. However, the Administration would also strengthen these existing measures to provide sustainable results in the long term. New measures, which might involve legislative proposals, were included under Phase II.

Proposed increase of the fixed penalty from \$600 to \$1,500 for spitting and littering offences

6. On the proposed increase of fixed penalty from \$600 to \$1,500 for spitting and littering offences, the Chairman asked whether this would lead to greater resistance from offenders and more confrontation between enforcement officers and offenders. He said that as reported in the media recently, there were already cases which required Police assistance in the enforcement of the fixed penalty system.

7. H/TC responded that the Administration had proposed to increase the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences from \$600 to \$1,500 after wide consultation. The community in general supported the proposal. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) added that as the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness Offences) Ordinance (the Ordinance) had been implemented for almost one year, the enforcement officers had gained much experience in the enforcement work. He said that the enforcement staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) were provided portable radios or mobile phones to facilitate them to enlist the assistance of colleagues and, if necessary, of the police officers, patrolling in the vicinity. He added that for the vast majority of fixed penalty notices issued by FEHD, police assistance was not necessary, and only around 10 cases of the some 15 000 fixed penalty notices issued involved minor assaults on FEHD staff. DFEH said that given the heightened awareness of the importance of environmental hygiene in the wake of the SARS outbreak, he hoped that there would be greater support for enforcement work in this respect.

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8. The Chairman informed members that the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) had given notice to move a motion at the Council meeting on 18 June 2003 to seek the Council's approval to increase the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences from \$600 to \$1,500 with effect from 26 June 2003. The House Committee meeting would decide at its meeting on 6 June 2003 whether a subcommittee should be formed to study the proposed resolution. The Chairman further said that if a subcommittee was formed, SHWF would have to withdraw his notice for moving the motion in order to allow time for Members to study the proposed amendments. Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) appealed to members for their support of the proposed resolution.

9. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that many public housing tenants living on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) were worried that the proposed amount of \$1,500 was too high a fine for them to pay. Mr WONG asked whether the Administration could issue community service orders to offenders who were CSSA recipients instead of fining them. H/TC responded that the suggestion of issuing community service orders would be considered under Phase II as this would involve legislative amendments. He stressed that the proposed increase in fixed penalty was only to discourage people from spitting and littering in public places. Given that all people were equal before the law, all offenders in breach of the Ordinance should be subject to the same penalty as imposed by the Ordinance.

10. Dr David CHU expressed appreciation of the efficiency of Team Clean in working out a series of measures for improving environmental hygiene. He expressed support for the proposed increase in the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences from \$600 to \$1,500 to increase deterrence.

11. Mr Michael MAK said that while he supported the proposed increase in the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences from \$600 to \$1,500 to increase deterrence, the Administration should formulate strategies to better protect enforcement officers from being assaulted by offenders. He expressed concern that there would be more resistance from offenders and the increased number of injuries caused to enforcement officers on duty, if the fixed penalty was to be drastically increased as proposed. He said that he had reservation about the enforceability of the proposed increase in fixed penalty for public cleanliness offences.

12. H/TC said that the success of the enforcement work hinged on the support of the community and, based on the surveys conducted by the Administration, about 70% of respondents expressed support for the proposed increase in the fixed penalty. DFEH said that over the past few weeks, there had been enthusiastic support for the Administration's stepping up enforcement against littering and spitting offences. In the past weeks, five spitting offenders had been fined as much as \$3,000 by the Court.

13. To address the concern of the enforcement staff about their safety while discharging their duties, DFEH said that he had recently met with the staff representatives to discuss any special training, equipment or support they needed in

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their enforcement work. DFEH said that the staff had been invited to forward suggestions of improvements to the management for consideration. He said that FEHD would look into any enforcement problems encountered by the frontline staff and provide assistance as far as possible.

14. Deputy Director (Estate Management) of Housing Department (DD(EM)) said that Housing Department (HD) had reviewed the enforcement procedures in the light of the experience in two recent cases of confrontation encountered by HD staff. HD would strengthen the provision of telecommunication equipment to the enforcement staff and would, where necessary, use video recording to collect evidence. In addition, it would strengthen training on how to control the emotions of offenders who resisted to be issued the fixed penalty notices.

15. Mr Michael MAK suggested that the enforcement departments should consider whether protective items such as batons should be provided to enforcement staff for self-protection. He considered that the enforcement departments should also remind the enforcement staff to avoid confrontation with offenders and protect themselves from being assaulted. DFEH responded that the enforcement staff had been trained to avoid confrontation and control the emotions of offenders. They had also received self-defence training.

16. Mr Michael MAK asked why the proposed resolution did not also seek to increase the fixed penalty for dog fouling from \$600 to \$1,500. He said that dog faeces would also spread communicable diseases. DFEH responded that the number of prosecution cases involving fouling of street by dog faeces was actually small. He explained that the proposed increase in the level of fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences was mainly to target at unhygienic behaviour which could spread communicable diseases such as SARS. He said that there was medical evidence that spitting and littering could contribute to the spread of SARS.

17. Dr LO Wing-lok pointed out that dog faeces would also spread communicable diseases and pose a threat to public health. He supported increasing the fixed penalty for fouling of street by dog faeces from \$600 to \$1,500. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed support.

18. The Chairman said that the Democratic Party had yet to decide whether it would support increasing the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences to \$1,500. However, he agreed with other members that the fixed penalty for fouling of street by dog faeces should be increased to the same amount as that for littering and spitting offences. H/TC undertook to consider members' views about increasing the level of fixed penalty for fouling of street by dog faeces as well.

19. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for the proposed increase in the fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences from \$600 to \$1,500. He said that the Liberal Party had supported raising the fixed penalty from \$600 to \$1,000 during deliberation of the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness Offences) Bill (the Bill) in 1998.

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However, he expressed reservations on the suggestion of increasing the fixed penalty for dog fouling to \$1,500. He said that the Liberal Party had to further discuss on this point. He pointed out that during the deliberation of the Bill, members of the relevant Bills Committee had come to a view that, since it was difficult to control dogs from urinating in public places, fouling of street by dog urine should not be included in the fixed penalty system.

20. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that when the Panel discussed the review of the enforcement of the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness Offences) Ordinance at the regular meeting on 27 May 2003, members had expressed concern about the small number of fixed penalty notices issued by some enforcement departments such as the Police. At that meeting, the Police had explained that it was inconvenient for police officers on foot patrol to carry the large-sized fixed penalty notices. Mr CHEUNG suggested that to facilitate the enforcement work of the Police, fixed penalty notices of smaller size should be designed specially for use by the Police.

21. H/TC said that the enforcement departments including the Police would strengthen their communication in sharing enforcement experience and seeking improvements. He said that the enforcement of the fixed penalty system could be further discussed under Phase II. DS(FEH) added that the proposed resolution to be moved by SHWF at the Council meeting on 18 June 2003 would also include amending the format of the fixed penalty notices. Under the proposed resolution, the amount of fixed penalty for spitting and littering offences shown on the fixed penalty notices would be revised to \$1,500. As to the size of the fixed penalty notices, DFEH explained that the four cleanliness offences covered by the fixed penalty system were provided for in various Ordinances such as the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208). If the notices were to be made smaller in size, there might not be sufficient space to set out all the relevant legislation. Nevertheless, he agreed to look into the problem and explore improvements.

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Hygiene conditions in public housing estates

22. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed concern about the implementation of the fixed penalty system in public housing estates (PHEs), particularly in those estates where the management had been contracted out to property service companies. DD(EM) responded that a series of short-term and long-term measures would be taken to improve hygiene conditions of PHEs, such as clean-up of 258 hygiene black spots in 99 estates, quarterly cleansing operations in PHEs, establishment of a 24-hour hotline to allow PHE residents to report drainage defects and hygiene problems, etc. For PHEs where the management had been contracted out to property service companies, DD(EM) said that although private management staff could not issue fixed penalty notices, they could seek the assistance of police officers or the authorised officers of HD in issuing such notices when necessary. In addition, HD had deployed seven two-member inspection teams to enforce the fixed penalty system in PHEs. He hoped that with the implementation of a series of improvement measures, the hygiene

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conditions in PHEs would be improved.

23. Mr WONG Yung-kan pointed out that HD could not terminate contracts with property service companies which were engaged by owners' corporations (OCs) of PHEs. He asked how HD would deal with those property services companies which failed to solve the hygiene problems of the estates under their management. He also asked what measures were being taken to improve cleanliness of the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) estates.

24. DD(EM) responded that for TPS estates, tenants of flats which were still owned by the Housing Authority would be subject to the new points deduction system. HD staff would take enforcement action against the public cleanliness offences and breaches of cleanliness conditions stipulated in the tenancy agreement. As for TPS flat owners, they had already formed OCs to take over the management of their own property. The OCs formed were obliged to look after the management and cleanliness of their estates and could, where necessary, summon police officers or authorised officers of FEHD in enforcing the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness Offences) Ordinance in these estates.

25. DD(EM) further said that the same assistance was also available to PHEs where the management had been contracted out to property service companies. Moreover, HD had set up a dedicated task force, i.e. the Mobile Operations Unit (MOU), to carry out blitz operations in PHEs to combat illegal hawking. DD(EM) said that it was mostly the new PHEs which had been contracted out to property service companies for management and their conditions were generally better than the old PHEs. Following the release of Team Clean's interim report, HD would also require property service companies to step up efforts to ensure cleanliness of the estates under their management.

26. The Chairman pointed out that many of the old PHEs had also been contracted out to property service companies for management. He commented that it was not practicable for the management staff to seek police assistance in issuing fixed penalty notices when they saw tenants committing public cleanliness offences. He said that the offenders would not wait for the management staff to call for the Police and would just walk away.

27. The Chairman further pointed out that the substantial charges levied by HD on property service companies for seeking the support of MOU had deterred these companies from approaching HD for assistance. The Chairman said that the Panel had previously raised concern about the enforcement problem of the fixed penalty system in those estates where the management had been contracted out to property service companies, but the Administration had still failed to address the problem. He requested H/TC to look into this problem.

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28. DD(EM) said that before contracting out the management of a PHE to a property service company, HD would conduct intensive operations to clear the illegal

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hawkers there. If the property service company subsequently found it necessary to approach HD for assistance in controlling the hawking problem, HD would deploy staff to carry out blitz operations in that PHE. However, HD would levy charges on the property service company concerned for the assistance rendered. He added that from June 2003, enhanced enforcement against illegal cooked food hawkers in six PHEs would be taken by joint hawker control teams of HD and FEHD, with the support of the Police. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed support for taking stringent action against illegal cooked food hawkers in PHEs to safeguard public health.

Littering, spitting and throwing objects from a height

Adm 29. The Chairman said that throwing objects from a height remained rampant in PHEs, and there were media reports that the windows of some housing units were made dirty by spit from tenants of the upper storeys. He urged HD to strengthen prosecution against such offences. He also requested that the Police should step up prosecution against drivers who littered or spitted while driving as he found that such problems were quite serious.

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Inspection of drains in PHEs

30. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that he had received many complaints from residents about problems of water seepage at the "triangular positions" inside toilets and kitchens of some Y-type PHEs. He said that given the special building design of these PHEs, maintenance work had been difficult. He asked whether HD would provide assistance to the OCs of these PHEs in estate maintenance.

31. DD(EM) responded that HD would take the following measures to improve the conditions of drainage pipes in PHEs -

- (a) setting up telephone hotlines for residents to report faulty drainage pipes to HD;
- (b) engaging 100 "estate drainage ambassadors" from May to August to inspect internal drainage pipes in older housing blocks or blocks occupied primarily by senior citizens; and
- (c) conducting inspection of external drainage pipes between June to August with half-yearly inspections thereafter.

DD(EM) said that for PHEs, e.g. TPS estates where OCs had been formed, HD had made injections to the maintenance fund, which was set up to finance future maintenance of those flats put to sale. Where necessary, the OCs concerned should use the fund for the maintenance work.

32. Dr LO Wing-lok said that the hygiene conditions of toilets at many public housing units for the elderly were poor and, due to structural problems of the drainage

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pipes, little improvements could be made. Dr LO said that the problem had posed an apparent threat to the health of the elderly tenants in the PHEs concerned. He considered that HD had the responsibility to rectify the problem. He asked when the first round of inspections to internal drainage pipes by the "estate drainage ambassadors" could be completed.

33. DD(EM) responded that the "estate drainage ambassadors" had already started work and they were conducting door-to-door inspection of indoor drainage facilities at 300 blocks in older estates with a high concentration of elderly tenants. Immediate repairs would be arranged should defects be detected during the inspections. This round of inspections was expected to be completed within three months.

Private places posing environmental or sanitary nuisances

34. In response to Dr David CHU, H/TC said that the Administration was also empowered by law to take enforcement actions against owners/occupiers of private places posing environmental or sanitary nuisances. DFEH added that an example of such cases was excessive storage of rubbish in some households causing environmental or sanitary nuisances to neighbours. He said that FEHD would first notify the relevant owners/occupiers and demand them to remove such rubbish. If the owner/occupiers did not take remedial action, prosecution should be taken against them. Moreover, FEHD would conduct clearance operations and recover the expenses incurred from relevant owners/occupiers afterwards.

Old tenement buildings

35. The Chairman said that there was serious hygiene problem with many old tenement buildings, e.g. accumulation of refuse in rear lanes, lightwells, staircases and common areas. He said that HAD should take a proactive approach in contacting the owners/tenants concerned and assist them to form OCs to enhance the management and maintenance of such buildings.

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Restaurants

36. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that the Administration should not introduce too stringent measures in enforcing the cleanliness requirements for restaurants. He said that the existing food laws and regulations were already sufficient in ensuring hygienic operations in restaurants. FEHD had already been taking effective enforcement against unhygienic practices such as breaches of the legislation. He considered that as far as restaurants were concerned, the proposed enhanced measures should only focus on toilet hygiene and cleanliness of rear lanes. He would only support FEHD strengthening enforcement against unhygienic practices such as food preparation and dish-washing at rear lanes, which were directly related to food hygiene. He also questioned the need to update guidelines on handling of food at food stalls and cooked food centres, as proposed in Team Clean's interim report.

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37. H/TC responded that it was necessary to raise the hygiene standards of restaurants to meet public expectation and to instil greater confidence among the public and tourists of the cleanliness of Hong Kong. DFEH supplemented that FEHD would focus on toilet hygiene and cleanliness of rear lanes. It would step up enforcement against food preparation, dish-washing and waste disposal at rear lanes, and display of food such as siu mei and lo mei without cover. He added that the enforcement work would be carried out in accordance with the existing food and hygiene legislation.

38. DFEH added that starting from June 2003, FEHD would also focus on pest infestation in restaurants through regular inspections and stringent prosecution against pest nuisances. As regards updating the guidelines on handling of food at food stalls and cooked food centres, DFEH said that the purpose was only to provide more detailed explanation on the existing requirements and enforcement procedures. The first draft of the updated guidelines had been provided to the trade early this year for their comments.

39. Mr Tommy CHEUNG further asked whether FEHD planned to step up inspections to food premises. DFEH responded that the existing inspection system would remain unchanged. Under the present system, food premises were categorised into three risk groups, namely: "high", "medium" and "low". Food premises of these three groups were inspected at intervals of 4 weeks, 8 weeks and 12 weeks respectively. He said that the inspection system targetted at those food premises which did not have a good record, and the inspections focused on the cleanliness of the food room, toilet and food storage/preparation in these premises.

40. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed reservation about the proposed measure under Phase II that a list of restaurants with unhygienic kitchens and toilets would be published. He said that this would have serious impact on the business of the restaurants concerned. Moreover, restaurants in breach of food and hygiene legislation were already subject to different penalties, such as suspension of licence, deduction of points, and fines, and these had provided sufficient deterrence. H/TC responded that this measure was proposed to be implemented under Phase II. The Administration would take into account public views in deciding whether this would be taken forward.

41. Mr Tommy CHEUNG suggested that, to facilitate refurbishment of toilets in existing restaurants, the Buildings Department (BD) should explore measures to speed up the process for granting approval to the modification plans. Mr CHEUNG expressed objection to the proposal that hygienic toilets should be a critical factor in the renewal of restaurant licences, as some restaurant operators might not be able to refurbish their toilets due to various reasons. He was also worried that FEHD would take over-stringent measures to deal with minor irregularities, such as the falling off of tiles in toilets. He said that FEHD staff should allow reasonable time for restaurant operators to take necessary remedial actions for such irregularities. DFEH said that he would take note of Mr CHEUNG's comments and FEHD staff would continue to carry

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out enforcement work in a reasonable manner.

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42. Director of Buildings (D of B) said that in processing plans for refurbishment of toilets in restaurants, BD would inform the applicants of the results within a specified period of time. He agreed to consider streamlining procedures to expedite the approval process for such plans. He advised that a new category of "minor works" and a new register of "minor works contractors" had been proposed in the recent Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123), and on enactment of the Bill, restaurant operators could engage registered minor works contractors to carry out minor works for the refurbishment without having to submit plans to BD for prior approval.

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43. Mr Tommy CHEUNG suggested that, to motivate restaurant owners to refurbish their toilets, FEHD should consider allowing deduction of accrued demerit points if they carried out refurbishment for the toilets in their restaurants. DFEH agreed to consider the suggestion.

Rear lanes

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44. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that to enhance cleanliness of rear lanes, Team Clean should consider providing large, wheeled and covered refuse bins in the rear lanes in districts such as Kowloon City. He believed that this would much enhance the cleanliness and rodent prevention at rear lanes. H/TC agreed to consider the suggestion.

Pavement

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed reservation about the proposal of strengthening enforcement against premises which failed to keep six metres of adjoining pavement area clean. He pointed out that it was impractical to require premises operators such as snack shop owners to strictly observe this requirement, as they might not have control of the six metres of adjoining pavement area of their premises. He said that the pavement in Hong Kong was narrow and, if the six metres of adjoining pavement area of their premises included part of the road, it would even be more difficult for premises operators to ensure the cleanliness of the area. He said that he would support stepping up enforcement against illegal extension of shop premises only if it caused obstruction problems and if the operators concerned did not take rectification actions.

46. DFEH explained that the action would target at those snack shops of which the shop fronts were often littered by bamboo sticks, paper cups, etc. thrown away by their customers. He said that the FEHD officers would enforce this requirement in a reasonable manner having regard to the circumstances in each case.

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Markets

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47. Mr WONG Yung-kan requested the Administration to elaborate on the measures to improve the environment and cleanliness of public markets. DFEH responded that in the short-term, intensive cleansing and disinfection of stall and common areas in markets would be conducted from July to December this year to improve their general hygiene conditions. In the medium-term, the Administration planned to streamline the enforcement procedures. FEHD was exploring long-term improvement measures for public markets and he would revert to the Panel on the proposals in due course.

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48. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that FEHD should improve the conditions of the Yeung Uk Road Market and Tai Sing Street Market, where were crowded with many live poultry stalls, in order to reduce the risk of recurrence of avian flu outbreaks there. DFEH agreed that markets with many live poultry stalls were more likely to be affected if there was recurrence of avian flu. He explained that FEHD had encountered difficulties in relocating some of these live poultry stalls to other markets due to objections from the stallholders concerned. He agreed to explore measures to improve the conditions of public markets.

Country parks and the concept of "bringing refuse home for disposal"

49. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed concern about maintaining cleanliness in the countryside including country parks, as local tours to these places had become increasingly popular. He urged the Administration to step up education and publicity on the importance to keep country parks clean. H/TC said that the Administration intended to tackle the refuse problem at country parks by reducing the creation of refuse. The Administration would step up public education to disseminate a message that people should develop a habit of bringing their refuse back to home for disposal.

50. Dr LO Wing-lok said that he had been preaching the idea of bringing refuse home for disposal and he was glad that H/TC also recognised the need to promote this concept. He believed that a high level of cleanliness could only be sustained through behavioural change of Hong Kong people.

Intensive Clean-up Day

51. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the proposed "Intensive Clean-up Day" would be conducted on a long-term basis. H/TC said that it was proposed under Phase II that an "Intensive Clean-up Day" should be launched at the end of each month on a long-term basis.

Role of District Councils (DCs)

52. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked about the role of DCs in improving environmental hygiene. Director of Home Affairs (D(HA)) responded that DCs played an

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important role in resolving district hygiene problems as they were most familiar with the state of cleanliness and the existence of hygiene black spots in their own districts. D(HA) informed members that a new approach would be adopted to step up district cleansing work. Under the new approach, members of the Clean Hong Kong District Promotion Committee, representatives of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and other relevant departments (e.g. FEHD and Drainage Services Department) would conduct inspections each month to the hygiene black spots in districts. They would also take photographs to record problematic areas which required immediate remedial actions.

53. With regard to difficult hygiene problems, D(HA) said that they would be tackled by the District Management Committees (DMCs), which were chaired by the District Officers (DOs) and comprised members from major Government departments. The DOs would closely liaise with the relevant Heads of Departments, Permanent Secretaries or Principal Officials and bring to their attention problems that could not be resolved at the district level.

Public education and community-wide involvement

54. Mrs Sophie LEUNG considered that to turn Hong Kong into a clean city, it was important to promote a sense of individual responsibility in environmental hygiene and cultivate a community spirit of respect for nature. She said that the success of the improvement work could not be achieved merely by government efforts. To promote community-wide involvement, Mrs LEUNG suggested that HAD and DCs should mobilise more volunteers, for example, among retired people, to participate in implementing the various improvement measures.

55. H/TC responded that community involvement was one of the strategies adopted by Team Clean. He said that Team Clean would involve a wide range of community members/groups, such as DCs, social services groups, volunteers, members of the public, etc. in all stages of the clean-up exercise. DD(EM) added that HD would mobilise, through the Estate Management Advisory Committees, tenants in PHEs to clean up their premises and such cleansing activities would be organised quarterly on a long term basis. Volunteers had also been mobilised to visit elderly households to render assistance as far as possible.

56. In response to Mr WONG Yung-kan, H/TC said that, as set out in the interim report, there were detailed plans for strengthening school education to enhance student awareness of public hygiene. Mr WONG Yung-kan suggested that the Government should also recognise the contribution of cleansing workers in the fight against the SARS outbreak by erecting statutes of them. The Chairman requested H/TC to consider the suggestion.

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Banning live poultry trade

57. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that the Administration should not introduce drastic measures, such as imposing a ban on live poultry in Hong Kong, without concrete justifications. He said that as the Administration had previously pointed out, it was impossible to eradicate avian flu viruses from the environment and live birds which carried such viruses could also pose a potential risk. He suggested that the Administration should take other measures to reduce the chance of recurrence of avian flu, such as strengthening farm biosecurity, segregating live poultry stalls from other stalls, providing separate ventilation systems and more space for live poultry stalls; and avoiding placing too many live poultry stalls in one market. He considered that the Administration should try out all these measures and review their effectiveness, before considering imposing a ban on the live poultry trade.

58. Mr Tommy CHEUNG reminded the Administration that the livelihood of thousands of people would be seriously affected if it decided to impose a ban on live poultry trade or adopt central slaughtering for live poultry. He pointed out that if freshly slaughtered chickens were no longer served in local restaurants, Hong Kong would lose its competitive edge as a "culinary paradise". As a result, not only members of the live poultry trade but also those of the catering industry would be affected.

59. H/TC said that experts had advised that to have such a large number of live chicken population having close contacts with humans in the retail and wholesale markets within our densely populated environment posed risks of further outbreaks of avian flu. H/TC said that the idea of imposing a ban on live poultry was only raised for public discussion. He assured members that the Administration would widely consult the community before taking a decision.

60. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and local farmers had been making considerable efforts to upgrade the biosecurity standards of the farms to reduce the risk of incursions of virus onto farms. Their efforts had proven to be effective as there had not been further outbreaks of avian flu for more than one year. He expressed dissatisfaction that the Administration had put forward the suggestion of banning the live poultry in the context of preventing SARS as the two issues were unrelated. He added that the live poultry trade had already formed a joint committee to reflect their views to the Administration.

61. The Chairman said that the Administration should further strengthen existing measures which could reduce the chance of recurrence of avian flu so that it would not be necessary to introduce a ban on live poultry, which would have great impact on the relevant trades. He also asked the Administration to conduct wide consultation before introducing any new measures.

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62. In response to the Chairman, H/TC said that Team Clean aimed at issuing the final report before mid-August 2003. The Chairman said that the Panel would hold a further meeting on 25 August 2003 to discuss the final report.

63. The meeting ended at 10:30 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 September 2003