

**立法會**  
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**Meeting of Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
on 19 December 2002**

**Background Paper prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat**

**Discussion on the Report of the Investigation Team  
for the 2002 Avian Influenza Incident**

**Purpose**

This paper summarises the discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on the Report of the Investigation Team for the 2002 Avian Influenza incident which was published on 18 May 2002.

**Background**

2. Since the first case of human infection of the H5N1 virus in Hong Kong in August 1997, there had been three outbreaks of avian influenza in Hong Kong which occurred in December 1997, May 2001 and February 2002. The Provisional Legislative Council (and its Panel on Health Services), as well as the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene had held discussions on the mechanisms to detect the virus and measures to control the disease.

**Discussions after the outbreak of avian influenza in February 2002**

3. The history prior to the outbreak of avian influenza in February 2002 has been detailed in the background paper on the control of avian flu prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2) 1973/01-02(06)].

4. Following the outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza in early February 2002 in some local farms in Hong Kong, the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene held a special meeting on 8 February 2002 to discuss the problem and the measures to be taken to control the infection. At the meeting, the Panel urged the Administration to seriously consider -

- (a) investigating into the causes of the outbreak and working out long-term solutions to prevent recurrence of avian flu;
- (b) tightening regulatory control of local farms and taking action against those farms which kept chickens far in excess of the permitted capacity;
- (c) taking additional precautionary measures for local chickens and separating them from imported chickens/other poultry to prevent cross-infection; and
- (d) reviewing the existing surveillance system and stepping up monitoring of wholesale and retail markets to ensure that they complied with all hygienic measures introduced for the control of avian flu.

5. The then Secretary for the Environment and Food subsequently appointed an Investigation Team, chaired by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation, to investigate the causes of the outbreak and to recommend measures necessary to reduce its recurrence. The Investigation Team also sought views of other experts and drew on the studies conducted by the University of Hong Kong and Massey University EpiCentre of New Zealand.

6. The Investigation Team published its report on 18 May 2002. The Team found that the H5N1 viruses were evolving continuously and had adapted to the land-based poultry around 2001. It also found that H5 avian influenza viruses existed as part of nature and could not be eliminated. As such viruses occurred naturally in waterfowl, there would always be potential for H5N1 virus to enter the live chicken systems. However, none of the H5N1 viruses detected in early 2002 shared the same combination of genes as the H5N1 viruses found in 1997 that caused serious disease in both poultry and humans.

7. The Investigation Team concluded that as long as there was a demand for freshly slaughtered poultry in Hong Kong, there would continue to be trade in live poultry. As a consequence, there would always be a risk of further outbreaks of H5N1 avian influenza with the accompanying potential risk to public health. The Investigation Team recommended the following improvements in addition to the existing control measures -

- (a) improving farm biosecurity;
- (b) enhancing measures relating to transport cages;
- (c) reducing the volume of trade in live poultry;
- (d) breaking virus cycles in markets by introducing an additional rest day;

- (e) enhancing surveillance tools and monitoring for emergence of new viruses; and
- (f) reviewing vaccination programme before establishing the role of vaccines in overall avian flu control.

8. The Investigation Team also recommended that the Government should start consulting the stakeholders as soon as possible to implement the measures.

### **Discussion on the Report of the Investigation Team**

#### *Meeting on 27 May 2002*

9. The Report of the Investigation Team Panel was first discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 27 May 2002. At that meeting, members generally agreed that the conditions in local farms should be improved and brought up to standard as soon as possible. Members were generally of the view that for those farms which were unwilling or incapable of meeting the licensing conditions and hygiene standards, strict enforcement should be taken against them.

10. Nevertheless, Panel members had reservations about the practicality and the effectiveness of some of the proposed biosecurity measures which would pose extra burden on the trade. For example, members considered it unrealistic to prohibit movements of people between farms or to avoid direct contact of farm workers with poultry markets. Moreover, implementation of the biosecurity measures such as segregation of the chicken production area would incur extra costs. As some local farms were unable or might not have the resources to meet the new requirements, members had requested the Administration to make an assessment on the impact of the recommendations on the live poultry trade.

11. Some Panel members also queried that the proposed additional rest day for markets would not bring any real benefit. They considered that the Administration should obtain more scientific data in support of such a measure, otherwise it should not impose the measure on the trade.

12. Some other members had requested the Administration to consider the possibility of using vaccines as a means to control the infection, and also to provide assistance to the farming industry to upgrade their operation and practices to present day standards.

*Meeting on 15 July 2002*

13. The Panel held further discussion on the Report of the Investigation Team at a meeting on 15 July 2002. As requested by members, the Administration had provided supplementary information on the improvement measures taken to reduce the risk of recurrence of avian flu outbreaks, as well as the estimated business loss of and financial implications on the live chicken trade. Two poultry wholesalers/retailers associations had also made submissions to the Panel expressing objection to the proposed additional rest day for markets.

14. At the meeting, Panel members reiterated their concern that some proposed measures, such as the additional rest day for markets, would have financial implications on the poultry trade, and that even with the implementation of these measures, the risk of recurrence of avian flu would still exist.

15. Panel members also urged that the Administration should make reference to the experience of overseas countries, and explore other possibilities, including the use of vaccines, to reduce the risk of recurrence of avian flu. To address the concern about the impact of the importation of chilled chickens from the Mainland on the live poultry trade, some Panel members had suggested that the sale of live chickens and chilled chickens should be subject to separate licences.

16. The Panel had also suggested that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department should liaise with the Lands Department to ensure that those farms occupying government land were brought under proper regulatory control. The Administration had undertaken to report the progress in this respect to the Panel.

17. The Panel had reminded the Administration to consult the Panel first before introducing any new measures after the consultation period of the Investigation Team Report.

**Relevant papers**

18. A list of relevant papers and documents is in the **Appendix** for members' easy reference. The papers and documents are available on the Research and Library Services Information system and the Council's website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/english/index.htm>.

## Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers/Motion Passed/Council Question</u>
Provisional Legislative Council	21 January 1998	Motion on "Improving the mechanisms for managing infectious diseases and imported livestock quarantine" moved by Hon CHAN Wing-chan
Legislative Council	6 June 2001	Motion on "The avian flu incident" moved by Hon WONG Yung-kan
Panel on Health Services	31 December 1997	Administration's paper on "H5N1 virus" (Chinese version only)  Minutes of meeting (PLC Paper No. CB(2) 1130)
	12 January 1998	Administration's paper - PLC Paper No. CB(2) 821(03)  Minutes of meeting (PLC Paper No. CB(2) 1280)
	9 February 1998	Minutes of meeting (PLC Paper No. CB(2) 1447)
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	21 May 2001	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 1629/00-01(01)  Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2320/00-01)
	18 June 2001 (Joint meeting with Housing Panel)	Administration's paper Nos. CB(2) 1852/00-01(01) & (02)  Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2) 333/01-02)

	10 July 2001	Administration's paper Nos. CB(2) 2065/00-01(01), (02) & (03)  Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2) 458/01-02)
	8 February 2002	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 1105/01-02(01)  Report on the Recent Avian Influenza Incident (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1456/01-02(01))  Supplementary Report on the Recent Avian Influenza Incident (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1538/01-02(01))
	27 May 2002	Report of the investigation team for the 2002 avian influenza incident (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2110/01-02)  Executive summary provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1973/01-02(05))  Background paper prepared by the LegCo Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1973/01-02(06))  Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2355/01-02)
	15 July 2002	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 2532/01-02(07)  Submission from Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2513/01-02(01))  Submission from Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2577/01-02(01))

		<p>Method of calculating the estimated loss of the live chicken trade (wholesalers/retailers/ transporters) if an additional "rest day" is introduced (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2632/01-02(03))</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2863/01-02)</p>
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