

立法會
Legislative Council

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(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 16 February 2004 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)
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung

Member attending : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP

Public officers attending : Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Food & Environmental Hygiene)

Miss Vivian KO
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Donald TONG
Deputy Director (Administration & Development)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr C W LAI
Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Attendance by : Department of Zoology, The University of Hong Kong
invitation

Dr Frederick LEUNG
Associate Professor

Dr Wallace LIM Boon-leong
Assistant Professor

Consumer Council

Dr Victor HUNG
Chief Trade Practices Officer

Hong Kong Retail Management Association (HKRMA)

Mr Norman YUM
Fresh Food Group Business Manager of The Dairy Farm Co Ltd.-
Wellcome & Member of HKRMA

Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades

Mr Simon WONG
Chairman

World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch

Mr Peter WONG Chun-kow
President

Agriculture and Fisheries Technology Promotion Association

Dr Lawrence H Y LEE
Chairman

Mr KWAN Wing-kin
Committee Member

Quality Broiler Development Association

Mr CHAN Yu-yuk
Vice-Chairman

Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association

Mr WONG Tek-leung
Chairman

Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants' Association

Mr NG Chi-kin
Chairman

Mr WONG Kam-yiu
Deputy Chairman

Hong Kong Grazers Union

Mr SHEK Chung-sang

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers' Association

Mr TSUI Ming-tuen
Chairman

Mr YIP Lap-fou
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association

Mr CHUNG Fung
Chairman

Mr FUNG Kin-chung
Vice-Chairman

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association

Mr WONG Wai-chueng
Chairman

Mr LAU Chum-sun
Secretary

Federation of Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories Hawker
Associations

Mr LAM Kwei-cheong
Chairman

Mr WONG Yin-wa
Organizer

Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers
Association

Mr WONG Wing-nam
Chief General Affairs Officer

The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited

Mr WONG Yuen-tai
Chairman

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

Mr KWOK Chi-yau
Chairman

Mr CHENG King-hei
Committee Member

Poultry Trade Workers' Union

Mr LEE Yuet
會務主任

Mr HONG Sen-chee
Deputy Welfare Officer

Hong Kong Chilled Meat & Poultry Association

Mr KWOK Shi-hing
Chairman

CHAN Wai-ming
Vice-Chairman

Joint Committees of Poultry, Livestock and Associated Trades

Mr HUNG Yuet-kin
Convenor

Fresh Poultry Wholesaler Association

Mr HUI Hon-man
Chairman

Yue Kee Restaurant Ltd.

Ms NG Kuen-wah
Director

Clerk in attendance : Mr Paul WOO
Senior Council Secretary (2)3

Staff in attendance : Ms Amy WONG
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

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I. Meeting with individuals / deputations and the Administration to discuss measures against outbreak of avian influenza in Hong Kong

The Chairman sought clarification from the Administration on recent newspaper reports that there was plan to suspend the import of live chickens into Hong Kong for a year.

2. Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) responded that the Administration would not comment on news reports, but he remarked that it was expected that it might take a fairly long time to resume imports of live chicken into Hong Kong.

Views of deputations

3. The Chairman welcomed the deputations to the meeting. The views of the deputations were summarized below.

Department of Zoology, The University of Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1345/03-04(01) - English version only]

4. Dr Frederick LEUNG said that he opposed to the suggestion of culling all live chickens in Hong Kong when one dead chicken was found to carry the H5N1 virus. However, he supported the recommendation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) that chickens infected by or exposed to the virus should be killed. He added that biosecurity measures in chicken farms in Hong Kong had improved, and each chicken

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farm in Hong Kong was now under close monitoring by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. In his view, mass culling was unnecessary and would only instil fear among the public.

Consumer Council

5. Dr Victor HUNG said that the Consumer Council generally supported the policy and measures of the Administration to safeguard public health.

Hong Kong Retail Management Association

6. Mr Norman YUM said that avian influenza (AI) had adversely affected the retail industry. Nonetheless, being a responsible retailer, the Association supported the measures taken by the Administration for the sake of ensuring safety and health to the public.

Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades

7. Mr Simon WONG opposed the Administration's plan of culling all chickens in Hong Kong where one chicken was found infected with H5N1. He said that so far the Department of Health had not issued any warning to the public that eating chicken was unsafe. Mass culling of chickens would affect consumers' eating habit and lead to increase in the prices of other meat. Mr WONG urged the Administration to take into account the impact on the livelihood of poultry wholesalers and retailers when considering the option of central slaughtering.

World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(01)]

8. Mr Peter WONG opposed the mass culling plan as it would only cause public panic and would not prevent an outbreak of AI. Mr WONG believed that with the stringent preventive measures in place and vaccination of chickens against the H5 virus, killing only the infected chickens would be sufficient to stop the spread of the virus. He added that it was necessary for the Administration to adopt a balanced approach after having considered the views of all affected parties, and also the professional views of animal experts and veterinarians. He referred members to an abstract from the Lancet (Volume 363, 24 January 2004) which was attached to the Association's written submission in support of his views.

9. Mr Peter WONG further said that since there were also AI outbreaks in places which adopted central slaughtering, such as the United States and the Netherlands, he believed that central slaughtering was not a satisfactory solution to AI. He pointed out that similar views were expressed by an AI expert, Dr Robert Webster.

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10. Mr WONG recommended that improvements should be made to the environment of local markets to enable small operators selling fresh meat to compete with the supermarkets.

Agriculture and Fisheries Technology Promotion Association

11. Dr Lawrence LEE said that he opposed to the suggestion of killing all live chickens when one chicken was found to be infected with H5N1. He said that with the strict licensing system and stringent bio-security and preventive measures in place (such as immunization of all chickens in Hong Kong with the bird flu vaccine), it would be sufficient to kill only the chickens infected with or exposed to H5 virus in accordance with WHO's recommendation. He said that as pointed out by Dr Rober Webster, Hong Kong had done very well in combating against the outbreak of AI.

Quality Broiler Development Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(02)]

12. Mr CHAN Yu-yuk said that as AI could not be completely eradicated, the public could consider alternatives to consumption of live chickens. He explained to members the advantages of cooked chicken as an alternative.

Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(03)]

13. Mr WONG Tek-leung said that he shared similar views to that of Mr Peter WONG (paragraphs 8-9 above). He referred members to the views elaborated in the Association's submission.

Hong Kong Grazers Union

14. Mr SHEK Chung-sang said that he was against the measure of killing all chickens when one chicken was found infected with H5N1. He said that this was not the best or the most scientific way to deal with the problem, and this would only propagate a negative image of Hong Kong. Referring to the proposed compensation to poultry farmers and other affected parties, he called upon the Administration to provide assistance and relief measures for the transportation workers. He urged the Administration to offer interest-free loans to poultry trade operators, and formulate a long-term policy to promote the local fishery and agricultural industries.

Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants' Association

15. Mr NG Chi-kin said that the Association would not support central slaughtering, in the absence of proof that it was an effective means to guard against AI outbreak.

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Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers' Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1479/03-04(01)]

16. Mr TSUI Ming-tuen opposed the culling of all live chickens in Hong Kong in the event that one chicken was found infected with H5N1. He expressed dissatisfaction at the suspension of importation of live chickens into Hong Kong for an indefinite period. While in support of the existing surveillance system, Mr TSUI suggested that a permanent inspection point should be established at Man Kam To to inspect the live poultry. He urged the Administration not to be overly led by the views of the "phobia-stricken" specialists, and that the Administration should resume importation of live chickens from the Mainland as soon as possible.

Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1345/03-04(02)]

17. Mr FUNG Kin-chung opposed the massive culling plan if one chicken was found infected with H5N1. He said that such a measure lacked scientific justifications. He opined that the Government should formulate a long-term policy on agricultural development in Hong Kong. He requested the Administration to make reference to the Mainland experience in the prevention of AI.

18. On the proposal of central slaughtering, Mr FUNG Kin-chung called for a cautious approach to be taken by the Government, in view of the significant and far-reaching implications on local trade operators.

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(04)]

19. Mr WONG Wai-chuen opposed the proposed mass culling of live chickens. He cautioned that the warnings given by specialists about possible outbreaks of AI would have adverse impact on Hong Kong which was known to be a "gourmets' paradise". He said that the Government and local poultry trade operators had put in place very effective measures against AI.

20. Mr WONG added that he did not support the proposal of central slaughtering. In his view, the proposal reflected the inability of the Government to find better and more effective monitoring measures.

Federation of Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories Hawker Associations

21. Mr LAM Kwei-cheong said that the Federation was of the view that the proposed measure of mass culling of live chickens was non-scientific and would cause serious financial loss to the trade. The Federation also opposed the proposal of central slaughtering, which would affect the livelihood of poultry workers. He considered

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that the Administration should waive the market stall rental for six months to help the trade operators to tide over this difficult period.

Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1345/03-04(03)]

22. Mr WONG Wing-nam said that the Association was against the proposal of mass culling of live chickens in Hong Kong when one chicken was found infected with H5N1. He supported the preventive measures which had been put in place. He urged the Administration to resume importation of live chickens into Hong Kong as soon as possible.

23. Mr WONG also opined that the Administration should review the legislative provisions, to see if there was a case of relaxing the present requirements that the licence would be terminated after the issue of one verbal warning and one written warning.

The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(05)]

24. Mr WONG Yuen-tai said that the Association opposed the proposed measure of mass culling as there were insufficient scientific justifications. He considered that the chance of an AI outbreak in Hong Kong was slim, and he criticized the Administration for not providing sufficient assistance to the local poultry industry. He stated the Association's position as follows -

- (a) the local chicken farms had cooperated well with the Government by adopting adequate biosecurity measures, including immunization of all chickens against H5N1;
- (b) infection of one chicken did not necessarily mean that the rest would be infected, and the uninfected chickens would be safe for consumption. The use of sentinel (unvaccinated) chickens to detect AI infection should be dispensed with;
- (c) if there was an infection case, the Administration should find out the source of infection instead of resorting to mass culling; and
- (d) the Administration should formulate a long-term policy on AI prevention, and also measures to protect the livelihood of poultry trade workers, such as providing relief payments where necessary.

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

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1345/03-04(04)]

25. Mr KWOK Chi-yau said that the Association opposed to mass culling of live chickens. He considered that with proper monitoring of the conditions in farms and the markets and with the experience gained in handling previous AI outbreaks, the chance of having another outbreak of AI in Hong Kong was slim. He commented that the suspension of importation of all poultry into Hong Kong was unreasonable, and would create false alarm to the public. He urged the Administration to resume importation of poultry as soon as possible, and provide assistance to the affected poultry traders and workers.

Poultry Trade Workers' Union

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1345/03-04(05)]

26. Mr LEE Yuet said that the Union opposed to mass culling of live chickens. He pointed out that the import ban, the media reports and the public statements made by Government officials on the AI situation had caused unnecessary fear about chicken consumption in the community. As a result, over 80% of workers in the trade had been forced out of job. He urged the Administration to lift the ban on importation of live chickens into Hong Kong, take measures to restore public confidence in the consumption of chickens, and provide financial relief to trade operators and workers.

Hong Kong Chilled Meat & Poultry Association

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/03-04(06)]

27. Mr KWOK Shi-hing said that the chilled meat and poultry trade accepted the suspension of importation of chilled/frozen meat and poultry into Hong Kong for the sake of safeguarding public health. However, the trade had as a result suffered tremendous financial loss since the import ban on 30 January. He urged the Administration to resume importation of chilled/frozen poultry as soon as practicable. He also made the following suggestions -

- (a) supervision of the operation of the Mainland processing plants by staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department should be strengthened;
- (b) importation of viscera of poultry into Hong Kong should be suspended; and
- (c) the number of samples for inspection should be increased.

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Joint Committees of Poultry, Livestock and Associated Trades

28. Mr HUNG Yuet-kin said that there were AI outbreaks even in the advanced countries. In his view, mass culling and the use of sentinel chickens were unnecessary, and the "cull-and-compensate" policy would only drive the poultry traders out of business.

Fresh Poultry Wholesaler Association

29. Mr HUI Hon-man expressed opposition to mass culling of live chickens. He criticized the Administration for not having carefully considered the impact of the importation ban on live chickens into Hong Kong on the livelihood of trade operators and workers.

30. Mr HUI also objected to the central slaughtering of chickens which he believed would drive consumers away from the traditional wet markets to the supermarkets, as in the case of the central slaughtering of geese and ducks. He urged the Administration to conduct wide consultation with the trade before embarking on any new measures.

Yue Kee Restaurant Ltd.

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1345/03-04(06)]

31. Ms NG Kuen-wah said that she supported the suspension of importation of chilled/frozen poultry meat into Hong Kong from the public health point of view. Nevertheless, the suspension had caused great hardship to the catering trade. She pointed out that the overall business of restaurants in Sham Tseng, for example, had dropped by 80% recently. She hoped that the Administration could map out effective measures jointly with the Mainland authorities so that importation of poultry into Hong Kong could resume as soon as possible.

32. The Chairman requested the Administration to take into consideration the views expressed by the deputations.

Discussion

Mass culling plan

33. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung agreed that the Administration should provide justifications on scientific grounds to support the plan of massive culling of chickens in Hong Kong if one single chicken was found infected with H5N1. He shared the view that the Administration should formulate long-term preventive measures and decide on the timeframe for resumption of importation of live poultry from the Mainland as soon as possible.

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34. Mrs Selina CHOW queried the different criteria adopted for the culling of chickens. She pointed out that while WHO recommended culling of the infected and exposed chickens only, and the Mainland would kill all chickens within the 3-kilometre radius of an infected farm, Hong Kong had adopted a cull-all strategy.

35. Dr Frederick LEUNG of the University of Hong Kong said that the standard of "3-km radius" area was adopted with some flexibility, depending on the density of individual poultry farms. This was to enable swift actions to be taken focusing on identified infected places. In response to Mr Michael MAK, Dr LEUNG further said that as H5N1 was highly pathogenic, any infected chickens could be detected easily and they would die quickly. He considered it unnecessary to cull all the live chickens when one dead chicken was found infected, and WHO's recommendation to kill only the infected or exposed chickens would be adequate to stop the spread of the infection.

Sentinel chickens and other preventive measures

36. Mr Tommy CHEUNG commended the good efforts made by members of the trade in preventing AI. He agreed that it was not necessary to cull all live chickens if only one dead chicken was found infected. He opined that the Administration should also reconsider the need for sentinel chickens.

37. Dr Frederick LEUNG of the University of Hong Kong said that vaccination of chickens had proved to be an effective measure to prevent AI. There were both pros and cons in the use of sentinel chickens and it was an effective means to detecting AI infection. He said that as there were sub-types of the H5 virus, further researches on the effectiveness of the preventive measures would be necessary.

38. Mr KWAN Wing-kin of Agriculture and Fisheries Technology Promotion Association added that a major concern of poultry trade operators was that sentinel chickens could be infected more easily than vaccinated chickens. If the Administration adopted the mass culling approach when one chicken be found to be infected, it would create great hardship to the trade. He added that sentinel chickens were no longer in use in the Mainland, and Hong Kong should consider dispensing with the practice.

39. DS(FEH) responded that the purpose of sentinel chickens was to detect the presence of the H5 avian influenza virus, so that appropriate measures could be taken to prevent or contain a widespread outbreak of AI. As in all policy decisions, the Administration would balance the interests of all parties before taking a decision. He assured members that the Administration would continuously monitor the situation and review the existing measures.

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40. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked how the Administration could ensure that the preventive measures were necessary and effective. He added that he did not support central slaughtering, as its effectiveness in guarding against AI outbreaks was questionable.

41. DS(FEH) said that the Administration was confident of the effectiveness of the preventive measures in place, and the Administration would continue to review these measures. He advised that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau would issue a consultation paper to gauge the views of the public on policy directions and improvement measures.

Protective gear

42. Mr Peter WONG of World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch said that the AI virus was only transmitted via respiratory tract and mouth, and not by contact of hand. He opined that flexibility should be allowed for complying with the requirement of wearing gloves in handling live poultry.

Improvements to the market

43. In response to Mr Tommy CHEUNG, DS(FEH) said that the feasibility of introducing improvement measures, such as improvement to the ventilation system in the markets, would be included in the Administration's consultation paper.

Resumption of supply of live, chilled and frozen poultry

44. In reply to Mrs Selina CHOW, DS(FEH) said that the international guideline was that resumption of supply of live poultry could be considered 21 days after the last outbreak had ended. He added that resumption of import of chilled and frozen poultry could take place earlier as they posed less risks. He said that the Administration would keep a close watch on the AI situation in the neighbouring countries and inform the trade on the timetable for resuming importation.

Relief measures

45. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung said that the Administration should consider a package of relief measures including provision of financial assistance to the workers whose livelihood had been affected by the import ban. DS(FEH) responded that the Administration was actively considering the matter.

Way forward

46. Mr Tommy CHEUNG moved the following motion -

"That, this Panel opposes the Government's proposal to cull all live chickens should one dead chicken be found to be carrying the H5N1 virus, and urges the Government to comply with the guidelines issued by the World Health Organization to destroy only those chickens infected by or directly exposed to the H5N1 virus."

47. The Panel members present at the meeting agreed to the motion.

48. The Chairman said that in view of the wide public concern about a possible outbreak of AI in Hong Kong, the Panel would continue to monitor the situation, and the Administration should revert to the Panel on new developments. The Panel would hold special meetings where necessary to discuss relevant issues. He also urged the Administration to strengthen communication with the trade and concerned parties in considering measures to deal with the problems.

49. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:40 am.