

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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the Administration)

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of special meeting**  
**held on Thursday, 15 April 2004 at 4:30 pm**  
**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 LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP
- Member attending** : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
- Member absent** : Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
- Public officers attending** : Mr Eddy CHAN  
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food  
(Food & Environmental Hygiene)
- Ms Vivian KO  
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
- Mr Thomas CHAN  
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Mr Gregory LEUNG  
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr S P MAK  
Deputy Director (Food and Public Health)  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Thomas SIT  
Senior Veterinary Officer (Veterinary Public Health)  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

**Clerk in attendance** : Mrs Constance LI  
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

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

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**I Resuming importation of live chicken from the Mainland**

Deputy Secretary (Health, Welfare and Food Bureau) (DS(FEH)) delivered a power-point presentation on the arrangements on resuming the importation of live chickens from the Mainland.

*(Post-meeting note: The presentation materials provided by the Administration were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 2051/03-04 on 16 April 2004.)*

2. DS(FEH) said that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB), Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had met with the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) several times in the past few weeks to discuss the details of the requirements for import control and the necessary preparatory work for resumption of importation of live poultry from the Mainland. FEHD officers had also visited a number of Mainland registered farms supplying live poultry to Hong Kong and were satisfied with their preventive measures and surveillance programmes against avian influenza (AI).

3. As the outbreak situation in the Mainland was now under control and with the stepped-up surveillance, DS(FEH) said that the Administration proposed to resume the importation of live poultry on a trial basis before 12 May 2004. Agreement had been reached with AQSIQ to adopt additional measures during the trial period to ensure that

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all imported live poultry were healthy, and to enhance consumers' confidence in the consumption of chickens. These additional measures included -

- (a) selection of the crème de la crème from existing Mainland registered farms to resume supplying live poultry to Hong Kong;
- (b) strict control on the quantity of live poultry to be imported;
- (c) FEHD would inspect these farms to ensure that their conditions met its requirements before export;
- (d) the live poultry for export to Hong Kong would have to be segregated from other poultry in the farms for five days and pass the H5 test before export;
- (e) the initial consignments arriving in Hong Kong would be subject to inspection and would only be released to the market if they were found to be free from H5 virus;
- (f) live poultry would be segregated from consumers at the retail outlets keeping a distance of at least one metre, or with a plastic panel erected in front of the poultry cage; and
- (g) additional market rest days would be introduced for retail markets.

4. As regards the timetable of the pilot scheme, DS(FEH) said that Phase I would last for three days from 20 to 22 April 2004, and not exceeding 6 000 live chickens would be imported each day. No live chickens would be imported on 23 and 24 April 2004 which were rest days of the wholesale market. While 25 April 2004 was the rest day for the retail market, it was possible that the import could continue subject to the satisfactory results of Phase I of the pilot scheme. The daily quantity of live chicken imported would be increased gradually having regard to the results of the pilot scheme. The Administration would maintain close liaison with AQSIQ on the import arrangements.

5. DS(FEH) added that it had also been agreed with AQSIQ that importation of day-old chickens from the Mainland could also be resumed on 20 April 2004.

Importation and inspection requirements

6. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that he was pleased to know that import of live chickens could resume on 20 April. He asked about the Administration's plan after the three-day trial and when the import could be resumed at the normal level. DS(FEH) said that the import quantity would be increased gradually after an evaluation was made of the results of the trial scheme.

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7. In reply to the Chairman as to whether the normal import level could be resumed by 12 May 2004, DS(FEH) said that the Administration had to be cautious in increasing the import quantities in order to restore public confidence in the consumption of chickens. He would inform the Panel of the import quantity for the second phase after 23 April.

8. Dr LO Wing-lok said that at previous meetings, the Administration had mentioned that it would make reference to the guidelines set by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) which recommended a period of three to six months for an avian influenza (AI) infected place to be regarded as free from infection. Dr LO considered that the Administration had compromised its previous stance in deciding to resume the import of live chicken from the Mainland before the expiry of three months. He was of the view that the Administration's prime concern should be to safeguard public health and it should not only listen to the poultry trade. On the importation arrangements, Dr LO considered that stringent standards should be set for the hygiene conditions at the wholesale and retail markets.

9. Regarding the additional measures for the imports of live chickens, Dr LO raised the following questions -

- (a) the selection criteria of the crème de la crème from among the existing Mainland registered farms, and whether FEHD officers would continue to inspect these farms after the pilot scheme; and
- (b) the duration of the special inspection arrangements for the initial imports and the number of consignments expected to be covered by such arrangements.

10. DS(FEH) explained that OIE was considering reducing the requisite period for AI-free zones from six to three months. As the last case of AI in the Mainland occurred on 12 February 2004, the three-month period would end on 12 May 2004. SHWF had earlier said that there was a possibility to resume the importation of live chickens before 12 May 2004, if certain Mainland farms had adopted enhanced preventive and surveillance measures against AI. DS(FEH) explained that the Administration had not compromised on the principle of safeguarding public health. He said that only those selected Mainland farms which could meet the enhanced hygiene and management standards and with no AI history would be allowed to supply live chickens to Hong Kong. The Administration would take a cautious approach in resuming import of live chickens from the Mainland, and only a limited quantity would be imported during the pilot stage.

11. Regarding Dr LO's enquiries in paragraph 9, Director and Deputy Director of Food and Environment Hygiene (DFEH and DD/FEH) responded that -

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- (a) the Mainland farms selected for supply of live chickens to Hong Kong during the pilot stage was based on the recommendation of ACSIQ of the Mainland, and FEHD inspection findings that these farms satisfied the enhanced hygiene standards. These farms were sizable farms with proper management systems and good records;
- (b) FEHD officers would inspect the Mainland farms concerned prior to the resumption of import. There would be a timetable for further inspections to be made to these farms. However, due to manpower constraints, it would not be possible to increase the frequency of inspections to these Mainland farms; and
- (c) for the first phase of the pilot scheme, each consignment of live chickens would be inspected and tested for H5 virus. These chickens would only be released to the markets after they were tested to be free from H5 virus. A review would be carried out after Phase I of the pilot scheme.

12. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked about the time required for the screening tests, and whether the Administration would increase the percentage of sampling tests for the initial consignments in the first three days. DD(FEH) said that not more than three batches of chickens totalling 6 000 chickens would be imported each day from 20 to 22 April 2004. The number of samples drawn for blood test would be increased from 14 to 18 per consignment. The samples would be taken at Man Kam To boundary control point, before transporting the chickens to Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market. These chickens would be released to the retail outlets after the test results confirmed that they were safe. The whole process would take about four to five hours and would not delay the distribution process for sale in retail markets.

13. DS(FEH) supplemented that to avoid cross-infection at the wholesale market, chickens imported from the Mainland would be segregated from local chickens.

14. Mr Michael MAK raised the following questions -

- (a) the number of Mainland poultry farms specially selected for supplying live chickens to Hong Kong, and whether all of them have no AI record;
- (b) whether Hong Kong had agreed with the Mainland authorities on any contingency plan should problems be found in the imported chickens; and
- (c) whether there was any price control measure and how the 6 000 chickens would be distributed to retailers each day.

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15. The Administration gave the following response to Mr MAK's queries -
- (a) the 6 000 live chickens would come from 10 selected quality poultry farms and all these farms did not have record of AI in the past six months before export;
  - (b) the Administration would take appropriate actions having regard to the extent of the problem, e.g. the source and extent of AI infection. To guard against any possible problem in the resumption of import, a pilot scheme was introduced and the Administration would decide the way forward after conducting a review on the pilot scheme; and
  - (c) the distribution of the 6 000 chickens imported daily into Hong Kong would be decided by the market and not by the Government.

16. Mr Andrew CHENG asked whether there were provisions in the agreement between Mainland suppliers and Hong Kong that poultry traders could claim compensation if the imported chickens were found to carry H5 viruses.

17. DFEH responded that the discussion with Mainland authorities was on the import timetable and quarantine arrangements, and there was no specific provision on compensation. If any selected Mainland farms were found not in compliance with the hygiene requirements, Hong Kong could suspend the import of live chickens from these farms again.

18. Mr Tommy CHEUNG commented that the initial import quantity of 6 000 chickens would not be sufficient to meet the demand of some 800 poultry stalls and the catering trade. He urged the Administration to resume the import at the normal level as soon as possible, otherwise the livelihood of members of the trade would be adversely affected. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed similar concern.

19. The Chairman requested the Administration to inform the Panel of the Phase II arrangements as soon as possible. DS(FEH) agreed.

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Day-old chickens and fertilized eggs

20. In reply to Dr LO Wing-lok and Mr WONG-Yung-kan, DS(FEH) said that importation of day-old chickens was not counted towards the daily import of 6 000 live chickens from 20 to 22 April 2004. The Administration had not set a ceiling on the import quantities of day-old chickens which would be determined by the demand. The Administration would discuss the detailed arrangements in this respect with the Mainland authorities.

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21. Regarding the progress of the development of local hatcheries, DAFC said that this was proposed as a contingency measure when there was a widespread AI outbreak in the region. So far, two applications for low-interest loans to purchase hatching equipment had been received, and the loan scheme was still open for applications.

Market rest days

22. The Chairman asked the Administration to explain the rationale for an additional market rest day as the trade had expressed objection to the proposal. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the Administration would insist on the additional rest day, and what would be the impact on the trade.

23. DFEH responded that he noted that the trade had expressed much concern about the proposed additional rest day. The Administration would further discuss with the trade the proposal of adding a half-day rest day for retail market. He said that according to studies conducted by the universities, much improvement had been observed after the introduction of market rest days, as follows -

Period	Percentage (%) of samples found with H9 virus	
	Before market rest day	After market rest day
November 2003	5.3	0
December 2003	0	0
January 2004	3.4	1.9
February 2004	0.5	0

DFEH added that no sample was found to carry H5 virus in the past months. He further said that providing an additional market rest day could enhance consumer confidence and further reduce the possibility of AI outbreak.

Segregation of local chickens from imported chickens

*Designated wholesale market for local chickens*

24. The Chairman asked about the measures to segregate local chickens from imported chickens at Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market.

25. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC) said that in the long term, a separate wholesale market had to be provided in order to separate local chickens from imported chickens. The Administration was identifying suitable sites and conducting consultation with affected parties. The possibility of relocating the wholesale market from the urban area was also being explored. In the meantime, Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market would adopt management measures to segregate local chickens from imported chickens to prevent cross-infection.

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26. DAFC said that it was possible to carry out complete segregation for the first batches of live chicken but there would be difficulties as the number of import chickens increased. He said that works had started at Ta Kwu Ling to provide for an alternative wholesale market to facilitate switch-over of operation where necessary.

*Plastic panel*

27. The Chairman asked whether the additional measures, such as erection of plastic panel between customers and chickens at retail markets, would be put in place before the arrival of the first batch of live chickens.

28. DFEH said that the Administration had met with the trade earlier to discuss the implementation of these measures. Some simple measures, such as requiring customers to wear gloves before selecting chicken and putting selected chickens into a covered bucket, could be implemented immediately. As regards the erection of plastic panel to separate chickens from customers, some stalls had already implemented the measure while some others would need more time to complete. The Administration hoped that all these measures would be put in place by 21 April, and a one-week grace period would be allowed for compliance at retail markets.

29. Mr WONG Yung-kan and Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern that the erection of plastic panels in front of poultry cages would adversely affect the ventilation of poultry cages. DFEH explained that the panel would only be slightly higher than the poultry cages, and the height could be further adjusted if it was found to have affected the ventilation.

*Wearing gloves*

30. Dr LO Wing-lok said that he did not understand the logic of allowing customers to touch the live poultry with gloves on. He pointed out that wearing gloves would not protect the respiratory system of customers as the H5/H9 virus also existed in air. Mr Andrew CHENG expressed similar concern. He considered that the Administration should make it clear that customers should not touch live poultry even with gloves on.

31. DFEH responded that wearing gloves was only an interim measure. He agreed with Dr LO that there should be public education that customers should avoid touching live poultry even with gloves on.

32. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered it difficult to enforce the requirement that stall operators should not "knowingly allow" their customers to touch the chickens, and it would not be fair to penalize the operator for their customer's act. He believed that education and publicity would be more effective in preventing customers to touch the chickens.



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33. DFEH said that the operator would only be penalized if he deliberately allowed his customers to touch the live chickens. He believed that the situation would be improved after implementation of the medium-term measures to segregate customers from live chickens.

34. Mr Michael MAK shared the concern expressed by other members. He suggested that there should be disinfectant facilities in retail markets. DFEH responded that there were wash basins in the markets, and sanitizer was installed at some markets.

35. Mr Tommy CHEUNG clarified that while he would not support allowing customers to blow air into the feathers of chickens, he would not object to customers touching the chickens if they would wash their hands afterwards.

36. The Chairman concluded that members were of the view that the Administration should publicize against touching live poultry in public markets as such behaviour would pose health risks.

37. Mr WONG Yung-kan remarked that with the implementation of segregation arrangements at retail markets, it would no longer be possible for customers to touch the live poultry.

Vaccine against H5

38. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether FEHD officers had inspected the vaccine used by the Mainland farms supplying live chickens to Hong Kong, and whether it was the same vaccine used by farms in Hong Kong.

39. DD(FEH) responded that FEHD had discussed with Mainland's agriculture department about the vaccine used in Mainland farms. FEHD had examined the test records and accepted that the vaccine used was effective.

Mass cull plan

40. Dr LO Wing-lok requested the Administration to clarify whether it would pursue the mass cull plan if there was one case of AI infection.

41. DS(FEH) explained that the mass cull plan was initiated at the time when there were serious and widespread outbreaks of AI in the region. At that time, stringent and effective measures were considered necessary to contain the problem. Nevertheless, with the easing off of the AI problem and no new cases in the region for more than two months, the need for such stringent measure would not appear to be imminent.

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**II Any other business**

42. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:45 pm.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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