

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

LC Paper No. CB(2) 3243/03-04  
(These minutes have been seen by  
the Administration)

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of special meeting  
held on Friday, 4 June 2004 at 9 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  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP

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

**Members absent** : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo  
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung  
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP

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

Ms Priscilla TO  
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary  
(Food & Environmental Hygiene)<sup>1</sup>  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG  
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Mr LAI Ching-wai  
Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

**Attendance by :** Department of Microbiology, The University of Hong Kong  
**invitation**

Professor YUEN Kwok-yung, JP  
Chair of Infectious Diseases and  
Head, Department of Microbiology

Department of Community and Family Medicine  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor WONG Tze-wai

Department of Community Medicine Faculty of Medicine  
The University of Hong Kong

Professor A J HEDLEY  
Chair Professor

Hong Kong College of Community Medicine

Professor Gabriel LEUNG  
Associate Professor

Hong Kong Academy of Medicine

Dr QUE Tak-lun  
Consultant  
Tuen Mun Hospital

Department of Zoology, The University of Hong Kong

Dr Frederick LEUNG  
Associate Professor

Hong Kong Veterinary Association

Dr Henry CHEUNG  
Veterinary Public Health Representative

Dr John Donald TEATHER  
Hon Secretary

Consumer Council

Mrs CHAN WONG Shui  
Chief Executive

Dr Victor HUNG  
Chief Research & Trade Practices Officer

Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries

Mr LAI Yat-sang, David, MH  
Representative

Agricultural and Fishery Technology Promotion Association

Mr HAU Yiu-yin, William  
Treasurer

Mr KWAN Wing-kin  
Executive Member

The World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch

Mr Peter WONG Chun-kow  
President

Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades

Mr WONG Ka-wo, Simon  
Chairman

Mr CHAN Wing-on  
Vice Chairman

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association

Mr TSUI Ming-tuen  
Chairman

Mr KWAN Shui-kuen  
Secretary General

Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association

Mr WONG Wai-chuen  
Chairman

Mr LI Kam-yuen  
Vice Chairman

Fresh Poultry Wholesaler Association

Mr HUI Hon-man  
Chairman

The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited

Mr WONG Yuen-tai  
Director

Mr LEE Leung-kei  
Deputy Director

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

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Mr KWOK Chi-yau  
Chairman

Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association

Mr YEUNG Chung-shek

Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers  
Association

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Mr WONG Wing-nam  
Chairman

Mr NG Ka-lok  
Vice Chairman

Poultry Trade Workers Union

Mr CHAN King-woon  
Deputy Chairman

Mr CHAN Lam-fai  
Education Officer

Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association

Mr WONG Tak-leung  
Chairman

Mr CHAN Ying-kei  
Vice Chairman

Hong Kong Chilled Meat & Poultry Association

Mr KWOK Shi-hing  
Chairman

Mr CHAN Wai-ming  
Vice Chairman

Federation of Hong Kong Kowloon New Territories Hawker  
Associations

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Mr LAM Kwei-cheong  
Chairman

Mr WONG Yin-wa  
Organizer

Association of Restaurant Managers Limited

Mr CHING Kee  
Chairman

Mr Louis CHAN  
Vice Chairman

Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants Association

Mr NG Chi-kin  
Chairman

**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 Meeting with deputations to discuss the Administration's Consultation Paper on "Prevention of avian influenza : Consultation on long term direction to minimise the risk of human infection"**  
(9 am - 12:25 pm)

The Chairman welcomed the 25 deputations to the meeting. The Chairman said that 20 of these deputations also provided written submissions to the Panel. The deputations' views given at the meeting were summarized in the following paragraphs.

Presentation of views by deputations

*Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine  
The University of Hong Kong*

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[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(01)]

2. Professor YUEN Kwok-yung gave a powerpoint presentation on the prevention of avian influenza (AI) and other infectious diseases from the perspective of infectious disease and clinical microbiology. Professor YUEN expressed support for the two options (i.e. the "cold-chain" approach and the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach) proposed in the Consultation Paper, because both options could diminish the chance of contact between the public and live poultry, and such contact was estimated to be 3.48 million per year. Professor YUEN believed that the "cold-chain" or central slaughtering approach would be most effective in preventing AI, as the Administration could closely monitor the entire operation process and the hygiene conditions to minimise the chance of trade members contracting the disease.

3. Professor YUEN explained that the presence of live poultry posed two important risks, i.e. there could be massive AI outbreak in poultry, and human diseases could also be caused by H5, H9, H7 and perhaps mutated H5 (after immunization) or even novel chicken coronaviruses. Professor YUEN pointed out that while geese and ducks were natural carriers of H5 viruses, about 8% of chickens carried H9 viruses. The immunization against H5 introduced in Hong Kong and China would not have effects on outbreaks caused by H7. Professor YUEN said that a total of 15 highly pathogenic H7 outbreaks in poultry were recorded globally since 1963, and many animal-to-human infections such as SARS could not be predicted. The SARS had shown that animal virus could mutate and jump the species barrier. While the risk of such occurrence was very low, once it happened, the results could be disastrous with a high death rate, and the death rate of AI related pneumonia could be as high as 70%. Professor YUEN further said that according to the estimate of the Asian Development Bank, during the SARS outbreak in 2003, China sustained losses amounting to US\$6.1 billion and Hong Kong's losses accounted for 2.9% of its Gross Domestic Product.

4. Professor YUEN also explained that the risk of human contracting the disease would depend on the viral burden in the poultry and the excreta, and also the amount of contact between human and poultry. If imported or farm chickens were to be channelled to central or regional slaughtering facilities, the risk of AI to human would generally be limited to farmers, lorry drivers and transporters and workers in the central or regional slaughtering facilities.

5. As regards the risks of bacterial infection at the central or regional slaughtering facilities, Professor YUEN said that the rate of bacterial growth in poultry meat would depend on the time the carcass was left at room temperature. The higher the room temperature, the shorter the time it would take to decompose the poultry meat. For instance, a chicken would visibly be decomposed when placed at 35 °C for four hours, while it would take nine hours to decompose under 25 °C. In this connection, the "cold chain" approach, which required the chicken to be chilled immediately after slaughtering, would reduce the risk of bacterial infection and the chance of food

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poisoning. Taking Salmonella as an example, Professor YUEN said that a recent survey in the United States found that chicken consumption was a newly identified risk factor for sporadic Salmonella enteritidis. While fewer chickens were consumed in Hong Kong than in the United States, Hong Kong's Salmonella deaths were four times that of the United States. Professor YUEN pointed out that one of the differences between Hong Kong and the United States was that chickens in Hong Kong were sold at wet markets while the United States adopted central slaughtering of poultry.

6. Professor YUEN was of the opinion that either the "cold chain" approach or "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach could definitely achieve good separation of poultry from the general public, hence reducing the risk of AI to the public. He said that the risk of Samonella infection would be higher in the present day wet markets than in central or regional slaughtering facilities because proper equipment and supervision could be provided in the latter facilities. He stressed that while there was no "zero risk" as such, the community and stakeholders should seriously consider long term measures to minimise the contact between the public and live poultry as in other developed places, taking into account the painful experience of AI outbreaks and the SARS, as well as the significant economic loss in these incidents.

*(Post-meeting note: With the agreement of Professor YUEN, most parts of his presentation materials had been forwarded to members' for their information vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 2664/03-04 (01) dated 7 June 2004.)*

*Department of Community and Family Medicine  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(02)]*

7. Professor WONG Tze-wai was of the view that if it was Government's long term objective to achieve "near-zero risk", central slaughtering (i.e. cold chain) approach would be the best course of action to eliminate contact with live poultry by the general public. As regards the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach, Professor WONG said that it was less preferred because placing the slaughtered chickens under room temperature would lead to other food hygiene problems and increase the risk of food poisoning.

8. On quantifying the risk of AI to the public, Professor WONG considered that risk assessment could be conducted even in the absence of a complete set of data on reassortment and mutation of the AI virus. He pointed out that no country would have a complete set of data in this respect. He said that by using the principles of population genetics and assumptions, the probability of transmission of disease from birds to retail workers and to customers could be worked out.

9. Professor WONG considered that the existing measures adopted in Hong Kong were effective, but it could not reduce the risk of transmission of AI to zero. He also



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considered the proposed medium term measures to improve the live poultry stalls in the retail markets necessary. He said that the Government should not only introduce segregation arrangements at markets, but should also improve the environment of the markets. He suggested that the Government should seek expert advice on the necessary improvements to markets, such as the provision of independent ventilation systems.

*Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, the University of Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(03)]*

*Hong Kong College of Community Medicine (HKCCM)  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(04)]*

10. Professor A J HEDLEY and Dr Gabriel LEUNG delivered a joint presentation from the public health approach. The presentation materials were tabled at the meeting.

*(Post-meeting note: The presentation materials were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 2664/03-04(02) dated 7 June 2004.)*

11. Referring to the written submission (LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(03)), Professor HEDLEY said that the Department of Community Medicine strongly supported the Government's proposals to reduce the risk of AI outbreaks in both chickens and humans, and also the Government's aim to achieve a "close to zero tolerance". Professor HEDLEY further said that based on a recent population survey, there were currently 3.5 million person-live bird contacts a year through the purchase of live chickens. If 10% of the population were infected with human influenza annually during the two flu seasons of 10 weeks each, about 134,000 of the human-bird contacts would have the potential to be infected by AI. Based on this figure, a conservative estimate of the risk of an epidemic human transmissible AI due to reassortment of human/avian viruses would be 1 in 1000, if 1% of the people in the human flu cases bought birds when they were ill, 5% of birds carried AI virus at the time of purchase and 1% of human flu cases co-infected with AI.

12. Professor HEDLEY said that it was critical to minimize human-avian contact in order to prevent an endemic of human transmissible AI. He further said that both the "cold chain" approach and the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach would be effective in reducing contact between human and live poultry, hence preventing an AI outbreak. However, the "cold chain" approach was strongly supported as it was a better alternative in producing maximum separation between human and poultry.

13. Dr Gabriel LEUNG said that the potential risks of AI were very high when compared to other risks, such as the risk of dying from heart disease in Hong Kong (1 in 1 250) and from injuries and poisoning in Hong Kong (1 in 3 500). It was therefore important to take precautionary measures and to achieve the maximum possible separation between human and live birds. Dr LEUNG explained that it was not

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possible to develop effective vaccine against reassortment of viruses without knowing which would be the new viruses. Dr LEUNG further said that the immediate and medium term measures introduced for markets, such as the market rest days and monitoring of poultry, were necessary. However, there were no fool proof measures against AI, and the Government would also need to adopt a long term strategy to prevent AI.

14. On the proposed long term strategy to minimise contact between human and live poultry, Dr LEUNG said that their recent survey indicated that 41% of the respondents supported the "cold chain" approach while 65% supported the "freshly slaughtered chicken" approach. Dr LEUNG further said that both approaches were supported but the "cold chain" approach was more preferred.

*Hong Kong Academy of Medicine*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(05)]*

15. Dr QUE Tak-lun said that Hong Kong Academy of Medicine supported in principle the "cold chain" approach because centralising the slaughtering process in one slaughterhouse would facilitate the monitoring of hygiene standards. The Academy did not favour the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach because there were higher risks of food-borne hazards and food contamination and it was difficult to monitor the hygiene standards in more than one slaughterhouse.

16. Dr QUE further said that the Academy considered that the precautionary measures as set out in Annex B of the Consultation Paper should continue, and that there should be strengthened education, training and auditing to ensure successful prevention against AI.

17. Dr QUE pointed out that the Consultation Paper did not provide sufficient data and figures, for example, there was no evidence to support the statement that small children were most vulnerable to AI infection, and there were no data on show how effective the precautionary measures in Annex B of the Consultation Paper would be.

*Department of Zoology*  
*The University of Hong Kong*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(07)]*

18. Dr Frederick LEUNG agreed that both the "cold chain" and "freshly slaughtered chicken" approaches would minimize contact between human and poultry and therefore reduce the risks of human infection of AI. However, Dr LEUNG queried the practicability and cost effectiveness of the proposed implementation of the central slaughtering policies. Dr LEUNG was of the view that implementing effective isolation policies to contain and localise the AI infected poultry, identifying the source of AI viruses and preventing them from reaching the retail market, would be more effective in preventing human infection of AI.

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19. Dr LEUNG put forward the following views for consideration by the Government -

- (a) Non-infected chickens were safe to touch and consume;
- (b) To achieve zero risk was theoretical, impractical and unrealistic;
- (c) Viruses needed a host to replicate, and AI virus would need chickens or ducks to replicate;
- (d) Bacteria could grow on non-live chickens; and
- (e) The Government should develop policy to eliminate the source of AI virus, and this could then reduce the risk to the consumers and the general public.

*Hong Kong Veterinary Association*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(08)]*

20. Dr Henry CHEUNG said that irrespective of which approach to be adopted in the long term, it was essential to involve the veterinary profession in the poultry meat supply chain from farm to table at both policy-making and implementation levels. He considered it unrealistic to achieve zero human transmission and infection in the Hong Kong situation because it was not possible to eliminate other sources of AI at the same time.

21. Dr CHEUNG was of the view that while central slaughtering could reduce contact between human and live poultry, it could not achieve zero risk as AI could still occur in farms and there could be bacterial growth and contamination in the slaughter process. Dr CHEUNG quoted the recent speech of Professor R G Webster that a central poultry slaughter system was not necessary in Hong Kong at this stage. However, if the Administration decided to go ahead, Dr CHEUNG urged the Government to involve veterinarians in the design and operation of the slaughterhouse.

22. Dr CHEUNG considered that although there would still be some contacts between the general public and live poultry under the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach, the risk of human exposure to AI viruses would not be high if effective monitoring measures were implemented before the live poultry reached the retail markets. Dr CHEUNG said that the enhanced surveillance measures adopted by Hong Kong after the AI outbreaks in 1997 had proven to be successful in preventing Hong Kong from being affected in the recent AI infections in the region.

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23. Dr CHEUNG reiterated that the veterinary profession should be involved in the planning and implementation process, and that Government should adopt a positive approach in tackling the problem of transmission of animal diseases to human.

*Consumer Council*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(12)]*

24. Mrs CHAN WONG Shui said that Consumer Council considered that consumer health was a matter of paramount importance. If the risk of AI outbreak was high, public health considerations should be more important than consumer choices. Mrs CHAN further said that according to a survey conducted by the Council in May 2004, although consumers believed that central slaughtering was more effective than regional slaughtering in eliminating the risk of AI infection, they still preferred regional slaughtering.

25. Mrs CHAN further said that the Government should perform a facilitation role to help create a vibrant and competitive environment for market participants by ensuring diversity, whilst maintaining traditional strengths, in fresh produce retailing. She urged the Government to actively encourage the trade to implement the long term measures, and closely monitor the effectiveness of the immediate and medium term measures. She added that the Council was willing to work with the Government to promote public education on the risk of AI.

*Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries*

*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(09)]*

26. Mr David LAI presented the views of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries. Mr LAI said that the Advisory Committee did not support the "cold chain" or the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach in principle. From the point of the view of the live poultry trade, central slaughtering would lead to loss of market as in the case of the ban on sale of live geese and ducks. Mr LAI further said that even with the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approach, there would be an increase in the chicken price, which would drive customers to buy chilled chickens. This could also facilitate market manipulation by large companies or operators.

27. Mr LAI added that if the Government wanted to further reduce the risk of AI, it should strengthen the sampling checks on chickens instead of reducing the daily import quantity of live chickens. He said that the Advisory Committee considered it impractical to have separate wholesale markets for local and Mainland chickens as it would only increase transportation costs.

28. Mr LAI said that the Advisory Committee hoped that the Government would propose a third approach other than the "cold chain" and the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approaches. The Government should educate the public about AI and the correct ways to improve the hygiene conditions and chicken-raising, so that human and live poultry could co-exist.

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*Agriculture and Fisheries Technology Promotion Association*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(10)]*

29. Mr KWAN Wing-kin said that it was not possible to eliminate the risk of AI infection as the viruses existed in the natural environment. The Association was of the view that the existing measures, such as vaccination of chickens and enhanced surveillance system, could minimise the risk of AI infection, and it was not necessary to introduce drastic measures which would have significant impact on the industry and the consumers. Mr KWAN further said that the Association did not support the "cold chain" or the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approaches, as the Consultation Paper did not give any data to support that these approaches could achieve zero risk. He pointed out that in 2003 and 2004, some countries/places which had implemented central slaughtering of live poultry, such as the United States, Taiwan and the Netherlands, also had AI outbreaks.

30. Mr KWAN said that while protection of public health was of paramount importance, the effectiveness of the proposed approaches in preventing AI and their impact on the community should be objectively evaluated. Mr KWAN quoted Professor Robert Webster's opinion that it would be for the next generations to consider whether to change the present mode of poultry sale and slaughtering.

31. Mr KWAN further said that the Association believed that the schematic design of the new market poultry stall, which was set out in Annex E of the Consultation Paper, could be adopted as the long term approach. The Association considered that this approach could separate humans from live poultry, reduce the chance of cross infection and also reduce the impact on the public and the trade.

*The World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(11)]*

32. Mr Peter WONG said that the Association opposed the immediate, medium term and long term measures proposed in the Consultation Paper, and also the policy of separating humans from live poultry. Mr WONG considered that there was very low risk of transmission of AI viruses to human, as there were already effective measures in place, such as vaccination of chickens, to guard against AI infection in chicken. Mr WONG opined that the recent Government publicity on AI had caused unnecessary fear of live poultry among the public. He said that it was not possible to achieve zero infection by the Government's proposed measures, as the viruses could be transmitted by other birds. However, the risks of AI infection should be very low given the very stringent control mechanism for live chickens in Hong Kong. He considered that the measures proposed in the Consultation Paper were based on assumptions rather than facts.

33. Mr WONG said that the central slaughtering option could not prevent AI and would even bring higher risk of food poisoning caused by cross contamination. As

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regards the regional slaughtering option, Mr WONG considered that it had high risk because the chickens would not be chilled after slaughtering and there would be high chances of bacterial growth.

34. Mr WONG further said that for the long-term benefit of the community, the Government should assist the development of the agricultural industry and to enhance the quality of our agricultural products. Moreover, the Government should improve the hygiene conditions and the environment of wet markets. While he did not support the segregation policy, he supported the segregation measures in markets in order to improve the market environment. He commended the schematic design of the market stall in Annex E of the Consultation Paper and suggested the erection of a large glass panel between the retail and culling sections so that the public could select the live chicken and view the culling process.

*Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(13)]*

35. Mr Simon WONG said that the restaurant trade did not see how central slaughtering would help prevent AI. Mr WONG considered that the proposal would not only change the culinary culture and affect the catering industries, it would also bring extra costs to consumers and the Government. Moreover, the employees in the live poultry trade would also be driven out of job, because consumers would switch to buy chilled chickens.

36. Mr WONG suggested that the Government should adopt HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) approach in preventing and handling AI, and require wholesalers and retailers to implement ISO and Good Manufacturing Practice in their daily inspection system.

*Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(14)]*

37. Mr TSUI Ming-tuen said that the Association objected to both the "cold chain" and the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approaches and the proposal of providing separate wholesale markets for Mainland and local chickens.

38. Mr TSUI further said that the risk of AI was not as high as the Government and Professor YUEN Kwok-yung had claimed. The live poultry trade believed that it was safe to have contact with healthy chickens as they had passed the stringent checks. Mr TSUI considered that the vaccination program and the surveillance measures adopted in Hong Kong had been very successful, and that explained why there had not been a case of AI in Hong Kong since the outbreak in 1998. He was of the view if there was concern about H7 and H9 viruses, tests should be conducted on such viruses and effective vaccines should be developed.

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39. Mr TSUI suggested that the Government should improve the market environment and strengthen the inspection and quarantine measures for live chickens, so that those which would pose health hazard to the public would not be released for sale in the retail markets.

*Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers and Retailers Association*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(15)]*

40. Mr WONG Wai-chuen said that the Association opposed the "cold chain" and the "freshly slaughtered chickens" approaches. Mr WONG suggested an alternative approach which sought to maintain status quo with strengthened measures on the following -

- (a) Monitoring the source of the virus in farms;
- (b) Improving the transportation of live poultry;
- (c) Extending the use of Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market for 30 years;
- (d) Implementing two Rest Days for retail poultry stalls each month;
- (e) Improving the ventilation system at the markets;
- (f) Reducing the number of poultry stalls at the markets through voluntary surrender of licence and improving the configuration of the markets;
- (g) Erecting plastic panel at poultry stalls to separate human from poultry;  
and
- (h) Involving the poultry trade in the task force to deal with AI outbreaks.

41. Mr LI Kam-yuen expressed dissatisfaction that the Government had been forcing the poultry trade out of business by controlling the daily import quantity of live chickens from the Mainland. He urged the Government to resume the normal supply of live chickens from the Mainland, and to waive the rental of poultry market stalls for six months if the import level was to remain at 30 000 chickens a day.

*Fresh Poultry Wholesaler Association*

42. Mr HUI Hon-man stated that the Association objected to the two options in the Consultation Paper. Mr HUI said that the Chairman of the World Health Organization (WHO) had considered that AI would not pose a problem if an effective surveillance and preventive mechanism was in place. Mr HUI was of the view that it

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was impossible to eradicate all viruses, and human should take a proactive approach to deal with viruses. He pointed out that while puffer fish was poisonous, it could still be sold in Japan for human consumption as long as the operators received proper training and obtained a licence.

43. Mr HUI Hon-man said that Hong Kong people preferred fresh chickens. He suggested that the Government should strengthen its communication with the trade to strike a balance between the interests of parties concerned.

*The New Territories Chicken Breeders Association Limited*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(16)]

44. Mr WONG Yuen-tai said that the Association strongly objected to the two options in the Consultation Paper. Mr WONG considered that central or regional slaughterhouses in Hong Kong could not compete with those in the Mainland, and the live poultry trade would be wiped out eventually. Mr WONG pointed out that it would be difficult to differentiate chilled poultry supplied by the recognised local slaughterhouses and those from illegal means.

45. Mr WONG further said that there was no evidence that central slaughtering would prevent AI, as Japan and Korea, which adopted central slaughtering of poultry, still had AI outbreaks in December 2003 and early 2004. Mr WONG considered that the existing bio-security measures adopted in Hong Kong had been effective in preventing AI. He appealed to the Panel for its support to maintain Hong Kong's reputation as a culinary paradise.

*New Territories Poultry-Culture (Geese & Ducks) Mutual Aid Association*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2637/03-04(01)]

46. Mr KWOK Chi-yau said that the Association strongly opposed to central slaughtering as this would wipe out the poultry industry, as seen from the case of the central slaughtering of geese and ducks. He considered that the Government should concentrate its efforts to monitor the birds in Mai Po Nature Reserve.

47. Mr KWOK said that he could not understand why the Administration would allow the importation of chilled and frozen chickens but not geese and ducks. He pointed out that there was roasted meat made from illegally imported geese and duck and the Government should tackle the problem.

*Hong Kong Livestock Industry Association*

48. Mr YEUNG Chung-shek said that his Association opposed the two options in the Consultation Paper. He urged that the existing mode of operation of the poultry trade should be maintained.



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*Hong Kong and Kowloon Poultry Dealers and Workers Association*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(17)]

49. Mr WONG Wing-nam opposed the two options proposed in the Consultation Paper and urged for maintaining the present mode of operation. He said that the Government should also listen to the views of other experts in order to obtain a balanced view on the way forward. He considered that the Government should strengthen its existing measures, improve the environment of markets, and encourage the poultry workers to attend hygiene courses by providing allowances for such attendance.

50. Mr WONG suggested that a task force be set up, comprising representatives from the Government and also the poultry traders, to review the daily import quantity in order to avoid over-stocking of chickens in markets. Mr WONG also suggested the Government to model on the early retirement scheme for civil servants in designing the voluntary scheme for surrender of poultry stall licences.

*Poultry Trade Workers Union*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(18)]

51. Mr CHAN King-woon said that the Union opposed the two options proposed in the Consultation Paper as they would not be able to prevent AI and would lead to unemployment of members of the poultry trade. Mr CHAN considered that as central slaughtering could not achieve zero infection, it would be a waste of money to build the slaughterhouse. Mr CHAN further said that the trade believed that the risk of AI infection was low, and since all birds and animals could spread diseases, it would be impractical to aim at fool proof in Hong Kong.

*Kowloon Poultry Transporter and Poulterer Association*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2664/03-04 (03)]

52. Mr CHAN Ying-kei said that the Association strongly opposed the two options proposed in the Consultation Paper, as they would wipe out the poultry trade and was a waste of public money. He said that zero infection was unrealistic and impractical. He hoped that the Government would provide reasonable compensation to poultry transporters who would be forced out of job or business with the reduction in the number of poultry stalls. He also hoped that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) would continue to waive their rental at the wholesale market until the daily import quantity of live chickens would resume at the level of 80 000.

*Hong Kong Chilled Meat & Poultry Association*  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2623/03-04(01)]

53. Mr KWOK Shi-hing said that if the Government could not guarantee that the proposed central or regional slaughterhouses could continue to operate in case of an

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AI outbreak, it would be a waste of money and efforts to build such slaughterhouses. He expressed dissatisfaction that the Government did not offer assistance and protection to the chilled meat and poultry trade, despite their efforts made in complying with the hygiene requirements to safeguard public health.

*Federation of Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Hawker Associations*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2664/03-04 (04)]*

54. Mr LAM Kwei-cheong said members of the Associations opposed the two options proposed in the Consultation Paper and they wanted to maintain status quo. They considered that the existing measures had proven to be effective in guarding against AI, as Hong Kong did not have any AI infection cases even when there were extensive AI outbreaks in the region early this year.

55. Mr LAM further said that the Government should improve the environment of the wet markets, and the Association welcomed the new design for poultry stalls. Mr LAM considered that if there was no live poultry for sale in the wet markets, the business of other stalls in the market would be adversely affected.

*Association of Restaurant Managers Limited*  
*[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2623/03-04(02)]*

56. Mr CHING Kee said that the Association considered that central slaughtering was unnecessary and made the following suggestions to further improve the existing measures to prevent AI -

- (a) Separate local and Mainland chicken at the wholesale market to facilitate tracing the origin of any infected chickens;
- (b) Reduce the number of poultry stalls in wet markets and improve the ventilation systems there, in order to facilitate reconfiguration of market stalls;
- (c) Accelerate the erection of plastic panel at poultry stalls to separate humans from live poultry at retail markets; and
- (d) Review with the trade the transportation arrangements for live poultry to reduce the chance of infection during delivery.

57. Mr CHING also urged the Administration to provide financial assistance to employees of the poultry trade who were affected by the change in policy.

*Kowloon Poultry Laan Merchants Association*

58. Mr NG Chi-kin said that the Association strongly objected to the two approaches proposed in the Consultation Paper as they would lead to unemployment

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of members of the poultry trade. He also said that central or regional slaughtering would create a lot of "garbage" as chilled chickens were no good for eating.

Discussion

*Risk of human infection of AI and the mortality rate*

59. Mr Peter WONG of the World's Poultry Science Association Hong Kong Branch (WPSA) requested Professor YUEN Kwok-yung to clarify the basis of calculating the mortality rate of AI infection cases. Mr WONG said that there were other reports that the mortality rate should be much lower than 70% because the number of H5 cases was well over 30. Mr WONG also criticised the approach adopted in the Government publicity programme against AI. He considered that the Government should educate the public about the nature and symptoms of AI rather than advising them not to touch live poultry.

60. Professor YUEN Kwok-yung clarified that the 70% mortality rate referred to the AI-related pneumonia cases, which was based on the findings published in the New England Medical Journal.

61. Mr Peter WONG opined that the risk of AI infection was extremely low, given the low incidence of AI cases with over 3.5 million human-poultry contact each year and more than 40 million live chickens imported to Hong Kong annually. Mr TSUI Ming-tuen of Hong Kong Poultry Wholesalers Association said that despite the high frequency of human-live poultry contact since 1998, there had not been any AI cases among members of the poultry trade and the public in Hong Kong during the recent outbreak in the region. He asked whether there was any objective assessment of the risk.

62. Professor YUEN Kwok-yung clarified that the possibility of AI infection was not high, but once it happened, the risks would be very high as it would lead to high mortality rate and immense economic loss, and also cause damage to the international image of Hong Kong. Professor YUEN said that it was not possible to predict the extent of risk as it would depend on the mutation/reassortment of viruses.

63. Mr Peter WONG asked about the extent of risk of laboratory infection as there were SARS infection cases originated from the laboratories in Singapore, Taiwan and Beijing. Professor YUEN responded that the laboratory staff of the University of Hong Kong had been strictly observing the procedures and standards recommended by WHO. The laboratory staff took temperature every day, and should they be found to have a fever, they would be segregated and treated by a special team in the Queen Mary's Hospital. Professor YUEN said that the University of Hong Kong had taken effective precautionary measures to prevent laboratory infection from spreading to the community.

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64. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that Hong Kong had made much improvement in its surveillance and hygiene measures after the AI outbreak in 1998. Mr WONG asked Professor YUEN how he would compare the hygiene conditions of Hong Kong with other places in the region, such as Vietnam. He also asked whether Professor YUEN's studies had involved veterinarians.

65. Professor YUEN responded that his team worked closely with the veterinarians of AFCD, and also the Food and Environmental Health Department (FEHD) in his work on AI. All his theories and findings were based on scientific researches and literature, as there were many previous studies on the subject. Professor YUEN further said that Hong Kong's hygiene conditions were better than that in some places, but it did not mean that it was not necessary for Hong Kong to change for the better. Professor YUEN added that developed countries like the United States, Singapore and Japan had already switched to central slaughtering.

66. Mr WONG Yung-kan sought clarification on the cause of death of a veterinarian in Netherlands who was infected by AI. Professor YUEN responded that some people might have some pre-existing diseases but they would not have died if they did not contract AI.

67. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether there was any data to show how low the risk of virus mutation and transmission to human was. He also asked whether Professor YUEN had conducted any comparative studies with other countries in this respect.

68. Professor YUEN responded that unlike the United States, many other places did not have the data for comparison. Professor YUEN said that there were still no conclusive findings on the extent of risk of AI virus mutation and transmission to human. Nevertheless, he pointed out that there were already 15 outbreaks in 40 years, and Hong Kong alone had two outbreaks. He reiterated that even one outbreak could cause serious damage to the community.

*Communication with the trade*

69. Mr WONG Yung-kan requested Professor YUEN to hold a further meeting with the trade. Professor YUEN responded that he had already held a three-hour meeting with the trade at the City Hall. He suggested that requests for further meetings could be made through FEHD.

70. Mr Tommy CHEUNG and Mr WONG Yung-kan suggested that representatives of the relevant trades should be involved in reviewing the importation of live chickens and related issues such as pricing, import quantity and over-stocking issues. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food & Environmental

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Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) responded that it was basically a public health rather than an operational matter, and the Mainland authorities had all along been involved in the discussion.

*Central slaughtering and bacterial infection*

71. Mr Peter WONG of WPSA requested Professor YUEN to explain how he came to the conclusion that the United States had a lower death rate for Salmonella infections because it had adopted central slaughtering. Mr WONG said that the excreta left on the poultry eggs could also cause Salmonella enteritidis.

72. Professor YUEN clarified that he had not drawn a conclusion that central slaughtering would result in less Salmonella deaths. He said that he had only mentioned one of the differences between Hong Kong and the United States when pointing out that central or regional slaughtering would not increase the risk of bacterial infection in poultry meat.

73. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether Salmonella existed only in chickens and eggs. Professor YUEN explained that there were other types of Salmonella but Salmonella enteritidis could be transmitted through consumption of raw eggs contaminated by the bacteria. He pointed out, however, that Hong Kong people seldom ate eggs raw and there was less problem of contracting the disease through consumption of raw eggs.

74. Mr Simon WONG of the Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades (HKFRRT) was of the view that experts should be able to provide scientific estimates on the risks and give advance warning or advice to the public. Mr WONG considered that Hong Kong should not only base on the data from the United States. He said that while Canada also adopted central slaughtering, the Chinatowns were still allowed to sell live chickens. He was of the view that some experts might have exaggerated the risk of human contact with live poultry, since Hong Kong did not have a single case of AI during the recent AI outbreaks in the region.

75. Professor YUEN said that not many countries had the necessary data for AI studies. He believed that over 99% of the chickens in Canada were centrally slaughtered. Given that there were only a few poultry stalls in the Chinatowns, the frequency of contact between human and live poultry in Canada could not compare with that in Hong Kong. He further said that he had been advocating separation of human from live poultry since 1997 but this was taken heed until after the SARS outbreak in 2003.

76. Mrs Selina CHOW said that it was clear that the medical sector and microbiologists considered that central slaughtering was the best approach to

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minimise the risk of AI infection in human. However, the issue involved changing the eating habit of the people of Hong Kong and how the relevant trades could adapt to the change. Mrs CHOW asked about Professor YUEN's views on the proposed short term measures to separate consumers from live poultry and the option of regional slaughtering.

77. Professor YUEN responded that either the central or regional slaughtering could achieve the purpose of reducing contact between human and live poultry. However, the central slaughtering or "cold chain" approach would be more effective than regional slaughtering in containing viral infection. Professor YUEN said that it would be difficult to achieve human-poultry separation under the existing mode of operation as there were 814 poultry stalls in our markets.

*Difference between fresh and chilled/frozen chicken*

78. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked the representatives of the restaurant trade whether their business would be affected if there were no fresh chickens and only chilled/frozen chickens were available. He also asked whether it was possible to produce delicious chicken dishes using chilled/frozen chickens, and whether the eatery patrons could tell the difference between eating fresh and chilled/frozen chickens.

79. Mr CHING Kee of the Association of Restaurant Managers Limited said that there would be significant impact on the restaurant trade if no fresh chickens were available. He pointed out that fresh chicken dishes had a long history and high reputation in Hong Kong and these were also essential for banquets. He believed that most consumers preferred fresh chicken to chilled/frozen chickens. He considered that it would adversely affect Hong Kong's reputation as a culinary paradise, if restaurants no longer offered fresh chicken dishes on their menu.

80. Mr Simon WONG of HKFRRT said that even "dai pai dong" used fresh chickens for their dishes, and the recent restriction on live chicken supply had pushed up the prices of live chickens. He considered that if fresh chickens would no longer be available for the catering trade, it would be difficult for the trade to assist AFCD in promoting our local fresh food produce.

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81. Mr CHAN Wing-on of HKFRRT said that while chilled and frozen poultry was used by the roast meat industry, most restaurants of reputation would prefer fresh poultry/meat. He said that at present, both chilled and fresh poultry could co-exist, and they had different markets due to the price difference. He was of the view that while there was definitely demand for fresh chicken dishes, delicious dishes could also be made of chilled poultry/meat. He further said that consumers who grew up in Hong Kong used to eat fresh chickens and could tell the difference between fresh and chilled/frozen chickens.

82. Mr KWOK Shi-hing of the Hong Kong Chilled Meat & Poultry Association said that since there were only 30 000 live chicken imported to Hong Kong each day, many eateries had already changed to use chilled/frozen chickens instead of fresh chickens. He further said that chilled chicken should not be regarded as "garbage" as commented by a deputation at this meeting, as it was only a different way of preparing the chickens.

83. Mr HUI Hon-man of the Fresh Poultry Wholesaler Association said that fresh chickens were more popular than chilled/frozen chickens, as shown by the sluggish sale of chilled/frozen chicken at supermarkets.

The Administration's response to other issues raised at the meeting

84. The Administration had made the following responses to some of the issues raised at the meeting -

- (a) The Government was committed to protecting the public from the risk posed by AI. Its long term vision was to achieve "zero infection" although it was not easy to achieve. However, Hong Kong had shown that it could achieve zero infection since December 2003 despite extensive outbreaks of AI in the neighbouring countries ;
- (b) The Government had the responsibility to inform the public of the consequences of AI infection and the ways to protect them from such risks. Given that the risk of AI existed in Hong Kong, the Government had to make endeavours to prevent humans from being infected by the AI virus. The central and regional slaughtering options proposed in the Consultation Paper did not aim to eradicate the risk of recurrence of AI outbreaks in poultry. The main concern of the Government was to protect humans from the disease. The two options could help separate humans from live poultry and minimise the risk of AI infection;
- (c) The Government had adopted a close to zero tolerance level on risk as Hong Kong could not afford to experience another AI outbreak that could lead to a major public health incident;

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- (d) Under the regional slaughtering approach, the slaughtered chickens would be delivered to the consumers by trucks installed with refrigerating facilities, and the chickens would be kept under appropriate temperature during the delivery process;
- (e) The suspension of the import of chilled geese and ducks had been lifted since 11 March 2004. However, it was understood that the Mainland authorities would need more time to make the necessary preparations for the resumption of supply, for example, more time would be needed to observe the effects of vaccination on waterfowls since they were the natural carriers of the virus. FEHD had also strengthened inspection and enforcement against illegal importation of chilled poultry;
- (f) AFCD had been involved in the preparation of the Consultation Paper; and
- (g) The Government, in collaboration with the University of Hong Kong, had conducted surveillance to detect the prevalence of AI viruses, including H9 viruses, in markets.

Concluding remarks

85. Dr LO Wing-lok considered that the meeting was successful in that the medical sector and the trades had expressed their views on the issues relating to the prevention of AI. He said that the medical sector supported the short and medium-term measures proposed by the Administration, and these should be implemented as soon as possible with the cooperation of the trade. He considered that if all these short and medium term measures were successfully implemented, Hong Kong would have made a great leap in preventing AI. Dr LO further said that if Hong Kong wanted to achieve zero infection in the long term, all possible options should be carefully evaluated.

86. Dr LO considered that the greater number of salmonella deaths in Hong Kong than US might probably due to the different eating habits of the two places. He pointed out that the Americans liked fried chickens but the people in Hong Kong preferred steamed/boiled chickens which might not be fully cooked and were often left under room temperature before and after cooking. He stressed that the chickens should be thoroughly cooked for safe consumption.

87. DS(FEH) said the Administration would evaluate the views of the trade and public and revert to the Panel on the way forward.

88. Mr Tommy CHEUNG urged the Administration not to implement any plan until after discussion with the Panel. Mr WONG Yung-kan supported Mr CHEUNG's view and hoped that the Administration would propose an option C after incorporating



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the views of the trade. He also asked what measures the Administration would propose to improve the livelihood of the trade affected by the change in policy.

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89. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman strongly urged the Administration to report the outcome of the consultation exercise to the Panel in the next session, before taking a decision on the way forward. The Administration agreed.

90. The Chairman thanked representatives of the deputations and the Administration for attending the meeting.

**II Any other business**

91. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
11 August 2004