

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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LC Paper No. CB(2)3271/03-04  
(These minutes have been seen by  
the Administration)

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Tuesday, 13 July 2004 at 10:45 am**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)  
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon WONG Yung-kan  
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo  
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung  
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP

**Members absent** : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS  
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP

**Public officers attending** : Item III

Mrs Carrie YAU  
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

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

Mr Vincent LIU  
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 2  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Gregory LEUNG  
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Thomas CHUNG  
Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control)  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Patsy WONG  
Senior Fisheries Officer (Fisheries Management)  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Item IV

Mrs Carrie YAU  
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

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

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

Mr Gregory LEUNG  
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Y Y HO  
Consultant (Community Medicine)  
(Risk Assessment and Communication)  
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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Action

**I Confirmation of minutes of meetings**  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 3040/03-04]

The minutes of the special meeting held on 15 April 2004 were confirmed.

**II Information paper(s) issued since last meeting**

Action

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)3073/03-04(02), CB(2)2985/03-04(01), CB(2)3022/03-04(01), CB(2)3058/03-04(01) and CB(2)3073/03-04(01)]

2. Members noted that the Administration had provided the following information papers -

- (a) Follow-up actions arising from the meeting on 28 October 2003 regarding the nuisance caused by the Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse [LC Paper No. CB(2)2985/03-04(01)];
- (b) Follow-up actions arising from the special meeting on 2 April 2004 on issues related to avian influenza [LC Paper No. CB(2)3022/03-04(01)];
- (c) Information paper on "Restriction on importation of beef from countries infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy" [LC Paper No. CB(2)3058/03-04(01)]; and
- (d) Information paper on "Dengue vector surveillance in Hong Kong" [LC Paper No. CB(2)3073/03-04(01) tabled at the meeting].

Restriction on importation of beef from countries infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)

[LC Paper No. CB(2)3058/03-04(01)]

3. The Chairman asked the Administration when the ban on importation of beef from Japan, Canada and the United States (US) would be lifted. Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (PS(HWF)) responded that the relevant authorities of Canada and US had been actively discussing with Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) the control and management measures they took to prevent and control BSE. However, consensus had not been reached that the measures taken had satisfied the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) requirements. She pointed out that Hong Kong was not the only place that restricted the importation of beef from these countries but was joined by neighbouring countries such as Korea and Japan.

4. Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control) of FEHD (AD(FSC)) added that in considering the lifting of the import ban, reference had been made to the OIE requirements and the risk assessment of BSE in these countries. Japan had recently provided more detailed information on its control measures, and FEHD would examine whether these measures satisfied all OIE requirements.

5. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether FEHD found any illegal beef from Japan, Canada and US for sale in Hong Kong, and what actions FEHD would take to tackle the problem.

6. AD(FSC) said that there had been stringent control of meat imported into Hong Kong. All meat imports must be accompanied by health certificates issued by the

Action

authorities of the exporting countries. There would be inspection and random check of imported beef at control points. FEHD also worked closely with the Customs & Excise Department in combating smuggling of beef into Hong Kong.

Admin

7. In reply to Mr WONG Yung-kan, AD(FSC) said that people were not allowed to bring meat into Hong Kong without authorisation. In this connection, the Chairman and Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the Administration should step up publicity that people should not bring in beef from Japan, Canada and US as gifts.

8. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that US beef was popular in Hong Kong and asked whether the Administration had any timetable for lifting the import ban. PS(HWF) said that there was no specific timetable for the resumption of imports, but US and Hong Kong had been actively discussing the issue. She said that safeguarding public health was the Administration's primary concern, and the import ban would be lifted when there was consensus that the control measures taken satisfied the OIE requirements.

9. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether there was a standard checklist for compliance with the OIE requirements, or FEHD had to conduct its own assessment on the control measures taken. PS(HWF) said that there were different checklists depending on the risk category of the exporting country, and there were different requirements for different categories.

10. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked about the differences between the low and medium risk checklists. PS(HWF) replied that the differences lay mainly in the feed management system. AD(FSC) supplemented that there were also differences in the handling of the Specified Risk Materials such as the brain and the internal organs of the cattle. He said that FEHD would consider the risk status of the cattle population of the exporting country according to OIE recommendations, and impose appropriate sanitary requirements for beef coming from these countries. The principle was to prevent the BSE agent from entering the food chain.

Dengue vector surveillance in Hong Kong  
[LC Paper No. CB(2)3073/03-04(01)]

11. PS(HWF) highlighted the salient points in the Administration's paper which updated members on the dengue vector surveillance work in the territory. She said that June to August was a high-risk period for dengue fever as the environment facilitated the breeding of the dengue vector mosquitoes *Aedes albopictus*. She appealed to the public to assist in anti-mosquito activities. She said that a \$10 million fund had been set up to support anti-mosquito programmes in grey areas and some 500 and 800 contract workers were employed by FEHD and Housing Department (HD) respectively to enhance mosquito control work. While FEHD would deal with complaints and was the major enforcement department for anti-mosquito work in the territory, HD would be responsible for the anti-mosquito operations in public housing

Action

estates, and the local district offices of Home Affairs Department (HAD) would cover all grey areas.

12. The Chairman asked about the reason for the surge in the ovitrap indices in Diamond Hill, Sham Shui Po (East) and Lai King, which were all over 40%.

13. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (DFEH) explained that this was mainly caused by the mosquito problem in the housing estates and construction sites in the districts, and the relevant departments had been stepping up their efforts to tackle the mosquito problem there. He said that the garbage accumulated in the blackspots and the clogged drains would be cleared first, and larvicide would be sprayed in these areas afterwards.

14. In reply to the Chairman, DFEH said that he had not received any report that ovitraps had been removed.

15. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that there were reports that the spraying of larvicide had caused the death of fish in rivers and streams, and it also destroyed the ecological environment. He asked whether the Administration had engaged tertiary institutions to conduct research studies on alternative methods to control the mosquito problem without causing damage to the ecology.

16. PS(HWF) responded that the Scientific Committee on Vector-borne Diseases (SCVBD) established under the Centre for Health Protection had been requested to look into the concern. In addition, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had been requested to explore the suggestion of putting some mosquito-eating fish in fishponds. She explained that the problem lay with the abandoned fishponds but not those in active operation. She pointed out that dengue fever had been in existence in Hong Kong and neighbouring countries since the 1950s, and it was not possible to eradicate the mosquito vector as long as there was grass and water. She stressed that the departments concerned would strive to maintain a balance between reducing the mosquito problem by spraying larvicide and preserving the ecological environment as far as possible. She said that the public should also contribute to the anti-mosquito work.

17. In response to the Chairman and Mr WONG Yung-kan, PS(HWF) said that the research findings of SCVBD could possibly be made public when available. She further said that there was a \$500 million fund for carrying out studies on infectious diseases, and any universities or research institutes could apply for funds to carry out such studies.

18. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had made any progress in tracing the origin of the three Japanese encephalitis (JE) cases, and whether there were any new cases.

Admin

Action

19. PS(HWF) responded that no information could be retrieved from the second JE patient who had remained unconscious and from the third patient who was a street sleeper. Nevertheless, the Administration was collecting blood samples of the residents in Palm Springs Estate where the second JE patient lived, but the virus was not found in the some 400 samples collected. While the blood test would continue in the infested areas, AFCD had been requested to conduct sample blood tests in pigs to prevent an outbreak of JE.

20. In reply to the Chairman, Consultant (Community Medicine)(Risk Assessment and Communication) of FEHD (C(CM)) said that the blood test results of the JE patients would have to be obtained from the Department of Health. As regards the breeding grounds for mosquito, besides the one found in Lei Cheng Uk Estate, no other breeding ground had been found. Special effort had been made to clear the illegal cultivation zones.

21. In response to the Chairman's concern about the illegal cultivation zones, PS(HWF) said that the Lands Department, HAD and FEHD had deployed existing staff to conduct joint operations in eliminating the black spots.

Admin 22. The Chairman urged the Administration to step up anti-mosquito efforts in July and August which was the high-risk season for mosquito breeding.

**III Measures to prevent ciguatera poisoning cases**  
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 3051/03-04(02)]

23. At the Chairman's invitation, Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)<sup>2</sup> (PAS(FEH)<sup>2</sup>) briefed members on the measures taken to monitor and prevent ciguatera poisoning cases.

Reporting of fish imports

24. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah asked whether the Administration would consider a compulsory reporting system to provide more effective control over imported fish and the tracing of problematic supplies. He said that the Legislative Council (LegCo) could expedite the scrutiny of the legislative proposal when introduced by the Administration.

25. Deputy Secretary (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) said that the Administration would adopt a two-phased approach to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning at an early stage. The Administration would consider the need for legislation, but since this took time, a voluntary Code of Practice would be developed in the meantime requiring the fish traders to provide information on each lot of fish catch. The fish traders would be consulted to ascertain whether there were any difficulties in complying with the reporting system. If members agreed to the approach, the Administration would proceed with the consultation with an aim to

Action

develop the Code by the end of the year. The consultation would also pave the way for legislation if necessary.

26. PAS(FEH)2 added that under the existing voluntary reporting system for coral reef fish, only 10 % of the fish catch had been reported to FEHD. It was hoped that the majority of fish traders would report their fish catches with the introduction of the Code of Practice. He said that the information to be reported was not complicated, and the fish traders were also aware that any ciguatera poisoning cases would adversely affect their business.

27. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah asked whether the Administration would also consult the fishermen, other than fish traders, whether they were willing to report their fish catches to FEHD.

28. Senior Fisheries Officer (Fisheries Management) of AFCD responded that it would be difficult to have a very detailed reporting system covering all fish catches, as some of the catches were of small quantities and might come from scattered sources.

29. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he was not in favour of enacting more legislation to regulate the trade as this would hinder the trade's development. Instead, he would support removing all barriers to facilitate the trade operation. He was of the view that the voluntary Code of Practice for fish traders was feasible. However, he asked whether the Administration had discussed with the trade that more sample tests should be conducted on coral fish catches, particularly those large fishes and those from new fishing grounds, prior to their importation into Hong Kong. He considered that this measure would provide more effective control than relying on the reporting by fishermen.

30. DFEH said that under the existing system, prior sample checks on large consignments of fishes could be arranged prior to importation. Some major fish traders would fly in some fish samples for ciguatera testing before importing large quantities of such fishes into Hong Kong. DFEH agreed with Mr Tommy CHEUNG that self-regulation of industry was feasible, as demonstrated by the successful cases in overseas countries. He added that the voluntary Code of Practice would be tried out for one year, before consideration was given to the need for legislation.

31. PAS(FEH)2 added that since the ciguatera poisoning incident in 1998, major fish traders had avoided importing fish from new fishing areas. He said that the number of ciguatera poisoning cases had dropped from 117 cases in 1998 to only five cases in 2003.

32. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the ciguatera poisoning cases only involved fishes from new fishing areas, or there were also problems with fish catches from old fishing areas. He urged the Administration to discuss with the trade that consignments involving a large quantity of fish or large fish exceeding a certain weight should be subject to ciguatera testing prior to importation.

Action

33. DFEH said that the problem fishes came from both old and new fishing areas. He believed that it was feasible to specify the weight and quantity of the fish catch that required testing before importation into Hong Kong, and the trade would be consulted. He added that normally the test results would be available in about two weeks.

34. AD(FSC) added that ciguatera could be found in coral fishes from both new and old fishing areas, but those from new fishing areas posed a higher risk. To prevent ciguatera poisoning, it would need the cooperation of the relevant parties, for example, consumers should avoid eating big coral fish and the trade should avoid importing fish from new fishing areas.

35. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed support for the Administration's proposal. Mr WONG said that the fishing trade was aware that any ciguatera poisoning incident would affect their business, and they supported advance ciguatera testing of the fish catches prior to importation and strengthening the reporting of fish catches to FEHD. Mr WONG pointed out that the ciguatera problem had existed long before 1998. With the voluntary reporting system and the trade avoiding sourcing from the new fishing areas, the number of ciguatera poisoning incidents had decreased. However, in the ciguatera poisoning incident in 1999, the problem lay with certain fishes from the Mainland. As the fishes were bought from local fishermen in the Mainland through the agents there, it had been difficult to trace the source of these fishes. He pointed out that the operation of the fishing trade in Hong Kong was different from that in Australia. He urged the Administration to discuss the proposed preventive measures with the trade as soon as possible.

Overseas experience

36. Mr LEUNG Fu-wah asked the Administration whether it would follow the practice of overseas countries in restricting the fish catching areas. He was concerned that restricting local fishermen to fish in certain areas might not be effective, as fishermen from other countries could still fish in these areas. PAS(FEH)2 said that the fishing operations of Hong Kong was different from that of Australia. It was feasible for Australia to restrict the fishing areas because the fishing activities usually took place along its coastline. However, the fishermen of Hong Kong would go as far as Indonesia and the Pacific Ocean.

37. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had made reference to overseas practice such as that in Singapore and Japan as these countries also imported a lot of fishes. He wanted to know how the Administration would balance the interests of the trade and that of the public. He also asked whether the Administration would consider making legislation on a mandatory reporting system, if the voluntary system proved to be ineffective after the trial period.



Action

38. PS(HWF) said that a mandatory reporting system had to be enforceable and there were also resource implications. She further said that in some overseas countries, advance information technology was employed to maintain information on their fishing industry which comprised large enterprises with large quantities of fish catches. She considered that Hong Kong's fishing trade could not compare with that of overseas countries, and a voluntary reporting system should be more effective for Hong Kong at the present stage.

39. PS(HWF) further said that unlike Singapore and Japan, Hong Kong consumed a much larger quantity of live fish. DS(FEH) added that most Western countries consumed frozen or chilled fish instead of live fish. He said that regulation of live fish was difficult for Hong Kong because unlike foreign countries, we did not have the resources such as a satellite monitoring system to trace fishing activities.

Admin 40. PS(HWF) agreed to provide information on the overseas experience in the regulation of fishes where available.

41. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that he had discussed with the Chinese University of Hong Kong the possibility of conducting a study on modernizing the information technology of the fishing industry. However, funding support from the Government was not available. He believed that in the long term, the fishing industry should be modernised and there should be regulatory control over the importation, landing and selling of live fish. He added that Japan also conducted ciguatera tests on imported fish. He considered that the objective of any regulatory system for the fishing industry should be to allow room for the industry to make a livelihood while safeguarding public health. He suggested that the Panel in next term could invite the trade to give views on the issue.

Admin 42. The Chairman requested the Administration to report to the Panel one year after the implementation of the voluntary Code of Practice. The Administration agreed.

**IV Risk assessment study on Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons in barbecued meat**

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 3051/03-04(02)]

Study findings

43. C(CM) took members through the Administration's paper on the study on polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in barbecued meat ("siu mei"). He said that the study concluded that charcoal grilling, high-temperature cooking and close proximity of the meat to the heat source led to higher level of PAHs, the cancer-causing chemicals. He therefore advised the trade to use gas grilling or electric-oven roasting to make barbecued meat, and electric grilling to cook dried meat, in order to reduce PAH levels. For the consumers, he advised not to eat excessive amount of barbecued meat especially the skin and fat.

Action

44. The Chairman asked whether cooking the meat to medium rare would reduce the level of PAHs. C(CM) explained that the degree of cooked meat would have no bearing on the level of PAHs produced, as the latter depended on the cooking temperature, the type of fuel used and the proximity between the flame and meat. Nevertheless, he stressed the importance of thorough cooking to ensure that any pathogenic organism, if present, would be killed.

Safe intake level of PAHs

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether there was any safe intake level of PAHs. C(CM) responded that there were over 100 types of PAHs and three of them, classified as "Group 2A" carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, were considered carcinogenic to human based on evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals. Since there was evidence that these carcinogens were toxic to genes, it was generally believed that there were no safe intake levels for these PAHs. Therefore, his recommendation was to reduce the intake of food containing the concerned carcinogens. C(CM) said that the Joint Food and Agriculture Organisation/World Health Organisation Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) would conduct further research on PAHs next year. He would advise the public and the trade on the findings when available.

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Seasoning

46. The Chairman asked whether the type of seasoning used would have effect on the level of PAHs produced. C(CM) said that the effect of seasoning on PAHs had not been included in the study, therefore no such information was available.

Advice on barbecuing

47. The Chairman asked whether the public would be advised to avoid the oil of the meat dropping onto the flame when barbecuing.

48. C(CM) offered the following advice -

- (a) The meat should be kept away from the flame as far as possible;
- (b) The fat should be trimmed beforehand; and
- (c) The meat could be pre-cooked so that a lower temperature would be required for roasting the meat.

49. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the Administration had information on the number of "siu mei" shops that used charcoal grill to prepare barbecued meat, the PAH levels for Korean style of barbecuing and the effectiveness of Chinese herbal tea in reducing PAHs.

Action

50. C(CM) said that there were about 1 000 "sui mei" shops and restaurants, 85% of them used gas grilling, 10% used electric grilling and the remainder used charcoal grill. He explained that PAHs produced could not be removed or diluted. While the study did not cover the Korean style of barbecuing, the findings revealed that proximity of the meat to the flame would give rise to PAHs, and gas grilling would give rise to lower level of PAHs than charcoal grilling. He took note of members' suggestions for further studies on the levels of PAHs produced by different styles of barbecue cooking.

Admin

**V Any other business**

51. As this was the last meeting of the Panel in the current term, the Chairman thanked the Deputy Chairman, Panel members and the Administration for their support to the work of the Panel. PS(HWF) also expressed her gratitude to the Panel for its support and contribution to solving the various problems in past years.

52. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:25 pm.