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食物及環境衛生諮詢委員會 LC Paper No. CB(2) 2583/03-04(23)

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2 June 2004

The Hon Fred LI
Chairman
Panel on Food Safety and
Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Hong Kong

Dear Mr Li,

**Views invited on the consultation paper
“Prevention of Avian Influenza :
Long Term Direction to Minimise the Risk of Human Infection”**

Thank you for inviting the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene to give views on the Administration's consultation paper “Prevention of Avian Influenza : Long Term Direction to Minimise the Risk of Human Infection”. The Advisory Council discussed the consultation paper at its meeting on 13 May 2004. This letter summarizes the views given by Members of the Advisory Council during the meeting.

Members in general supported the Administration's policy of separating humans from live poultry in order to minimize the risk of human infection of avian influenza. They recognized that previous experience revealed that humans contracted avian influenza through contact with live poultry or their faeces and that international health and animal health organizations had cautioned that H5N1 avian influenza might become endemic in poultry in the region and outbreaks might recur

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next year and beyond. They acknowledged that the potential risk to human health posed by avian influenza viruses was serious because of the propensity of the viruses to mutate and reassort.

The Advisory Council also discussed the Administration's proposed strategic approaches to achieve the policy of segregating humans from live poultry. The majority of the Members who had expressed views supported that the "cold-chain" approach (Approach A) and the "freshly slaughtered chicken" approach (Approach B) were the right direction to achieve the policy and some of them indicated their personal preference to Approach A or Approach B. A few had reservation on the necessity to pursue Approach A or Approach B now as a lot had been done to minimize the risk of avian influenza outbreak in Hong Kong and further measures would be implemented to reconfigure and redesign poultry stalls to minimize the contact between humans and live poultry as far as possible.

Other views expressed by Members at the meeting were as follows -

- There was some concern about the possible microbiological contamination of chilled and freshly slaughtered chickens and the potential health risk that could arise from consumption of such contaminated chickens. However, it was noted that the concern could be addressed through strict control over the slaughtering, processing and storage procedures, proper food handling and thorough cooking. In fact, the present situation where fresh chickens were purchased and kept at room temperature (in many cases from morning until evening) before cooking might incur a higher risk of bacterial infection than Approach A or B.
- To ensure that central processing and cold chain was indeed better and did not pose new health risks, it was suggested that the Administration should take into account experience in other jurisdiction with central processing and cold chain to ensure that any possible health risk was thoroughly researched.
- The policy of segregating humans from live poultry would have implications on the livelihood of live poultry traders. The

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Administration should take this into account and offer some form of financial assistance to the traders directly affected.

- The community still had strong preference towards freshly slaughtered chickens and the Administration should make provisions to respect this preference. Many members from the public might not understand the potential health risk of avian influenza and the merits of the "cold-chain" approach. The Administration should ensure that the information could reach out to the community so that informed and constructive discussions could be made.
- It would take time to develop and implement Approach A or Approach B. In the interim, the Administration should focus its efforts to pursue the short and medium term measures including the measure to minimize the number of live poultry market stalls through a voluntary buy-out package and reconfigure and redesign the stalls to minimize the contact between customers and live poultry as far as possible.

The Advisory Council is pleased to provide the above views to the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene and hopes that the views will be fully reflected in the Panel meeting on 4 June 2004.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Vivian KO)

Secretary, Advisory Council on
Food and Environmental Hygiene

c.c. Chairman and Members of the Advisory Council
on Food and Environmental Hygiene
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau