

立法會
Legislative Council

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

LC Paper No. CB(2) 974/04-05
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of Meeting
held on Tuesday, 1 February 2005 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki

Member Absent : Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long

Public Officers Attending : Item III
Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

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

Ms Annette LEE
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr YEUNG Shun-kui
Assistant Director (Operations)2
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr HUNG Hak-wai
Assistant Commissioner of Police (Support)
Hong Kong Police Force

Mr LAU Sik-tim
Chief Superintendent of Police (Support)
Hong Kong Police Force

Mr LEUNG Shiu-hong
Senior Assistant Chief Ambulance Officer (Headquarters)
Fire Services Department

Item IV

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

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

Mr LAU Sin-pang
Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Ms Wendy KO
Senior Agricultural Officer (Regulatory)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Ms Rhonda LO
Assistant Director (Operations)3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr L Y TSE
Head (Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch)
Centre for Health Protection

Mr Gary YEUNG
Deputy Director of Home Affairs (1)

Mr LAI IP-cheung
Assistant Director (Estate Management)1
Housing Department

Mr Simon YU
Assistant Director (Estate Management)1
Lands Department

Item V

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

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

Mr LAU Sin-pang
Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Dr Y Y HO
Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and
Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr Gary YEUNG
Deputy Director of Home Affairs (1)

Mr LAI IP-cheung
Assistant Director (Estate Management)1
Housing Department

Mr James HOR
Chief Estate Surveyor (Estate Management Section)
Lands Department

Item VI

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

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

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 : Miss Betty MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Ms Anna CHEUNG
Legislative Assistant (2)5

Action

I. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 759/04-05(01) and (02)]

Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next regular meeting on 8 March 2005 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) Suspension of issue of licence to food premises operating without licence; and
- (b) Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill.

2. The Chairman said that the regular meeting in April 2005 on 12 April 2005 would have to be re-scheduled to 15 April 2005 to avoid clashing with the Special Finance Committee meetings. Members agreed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since last meeting
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 650/04-05(01)]

3. Members noted that the Administration had provided an information paper on the training courses and one-off special grants to those unemployed live poultry workers whose employers had not surrendered their licences/tenancies since the last meeting.

III Removal of dead body

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 759/04-05(03)]

4. Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food and Environmental Hygiene) 2 briefed members on the Administration's paper which described the existing arrangements for the removal of dead bodies found in public places. He said that given the experience drawn from the recent cases, the Police was actively considering providing officers at the scene with suitable shelters surrounding the dead body, so that initial Police enquiries could be conducted within the screened-off area. In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had issued internal guidelines that the dead removal team (DRT) should, on receipt of a call for service, finish all the preparation work and start off to work within 10 minutes. The DRT should arrive at the scene as expeditiously as possible in order to shorten the time of exposure of the dead body in a public place.

5. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that to his understanding, the dead bodies were removed immediately from the scene in the past when such work was performed by the Hospital Authority. Mr WONG considered that the unduly long time taken to remove dead bodies found in public places in the three recent incidents was unacceptable, and they were not isolated cases. Mr WONG pointed out that in the case of the dead body found in Perfect Mount Garden on 2 December 2004, the Police informed FEHD to remove the dead body almost three hours after it had started the investigation, and the DRT team concerned took nearly an hour to set off to work after receiving notice from the Police. Mr WONG said that exposing the dead body for an unduly long time in a public place was disrespectful to the deceased, and this had caused much disturbance to the public. He urged the Administration to give a full account for the incident, and consider ways to improve the communication between the Police and FEHD to shorten the time for removing dead bodies.

6. Deputy Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Environmental Hygiene) (DD/FEHD) said that in 2004, DRTs of FEHD could arrive at the scene in roughly an hour's time on average upon notification by the Police to remove a dead body from a public place. In the three recent cases mentioned by Mr WONG Kwok-hing, DRT staff arrived at the scene within 15 to 20 minutes in two cases after notification by the Police. As regards the Perfect Mount Garden case, DD/FEHD explained that it was an isolated case in the sense that the DRT of the concerned region was out on another assignment at that time, and the time when FEHD received the report from the Police was very near to the lunch hour of the DRT. FEHD's Duty Room of the Hong Kong region received the report from the Police at 11:38 am. As the DRTs in Hong Kong and the New Territories regions were carrying out other assignments at that time, the case was subsequently referred to the DRT of the Kowloon region for action. By then, the staff of the DRT of the Kowloon region had already left the office for lunch (the lunch break was from 12 noon to 1 pm). One staff member of the team returned to the office at 12:40 pm, and he immediately made efforts to assemble the other staff members to report for duty at the office. The DRT

Action

subsequently set off at 1 pm and arrived at the scene at 1:25 pm to remove the dead body.

7. DD/FEHD said that having regard to the public concern over the time taken to remove a dead body in a public place, the Police would in future notify FEHD at an early stage, instead of waiting until the completion of enquiries and actions at the scene.

8. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Support) (ACP(Sup)) said that the Police attached great importance to reports of discovery of dead bodies. The time taken for investigation would depend on the nature of individual cases. He explained that when a dead body was found in a residential area, the Police had to conduct enquiries at the scene and at the home of the deceased. It would be difficult for the Police to confirm from where the deceased had fallen if no other family member was at home. ACP(Sup) further said that the frontline police officers had been reminded that under all circumstances, enquiries and actions at the scene should be conducted expeditiously, and to keep inconvenience and disturbance to the public to the minimum as far as possible.

9. Responding to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's enquiry, DD/FEHD said that there were a total of 10 DRTs in Hong Kong providing service round-the-clock. She added that the lunch break for DRTs was staggered between 11 am and 1 pm to maintain service to the public.

10. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that dead bodies lying in public places, particularly in housing estates, caused much disturbance to the public and residents. He considered that there was no need to leave the dead body at the scene while the Police was conducting enquiries in the vicinity. The dead body could be removed once the Police had completed investigation at the scene. Mr WONG asked whether the Administration would consider introducing a performance pledge on the time taken to remove a dead body found in a public place.

11. ACP(Sup) stressed that the Police handled each case of discovery of dead body with caution. A different set of investigation procedures would be invoked if suspicious circumstances were found by the Police. The frontline police at the scene would decide the course of actions to be taken. ACP(Sup) assured members that the Police would conduct the necessary investigation within the shortest time, and expedite action for the removal of the dead body.

12. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Food and Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) said that it would not be practical to set a time limit for completing the dead body removal process as the circumstances of each case varied. He agreed that dead bodies should be removed from the scene at the shortest possible time, after completion of the necessary investigations. To shorten the time of exposure of the dead body in a public place, the Police would notify FEHD as soon as

Action

a report on discovery of a dead body was received. This would facilitate FEHD to make necessary staff deployment so that DRT could arrive at the scene within a reasonable time. He added that in 2004, DRTs handled about five dead body removal cases on average as requested by the Police each day. Under normal circumstances, a DRT could arrive at the scene in 30 to 60 minutes after notification by the Police.

13. Mr Bernard CHAN said that while he accepted that the Perfect Mount Garden incident was an isolated case, he hoped that there would not be similar cases in future. Mr CHAN asked whether the Police would adopt an expeditious enquiry process if a dead body was found in the Central District, to minimise disturbance to the passengers and traffic.

14. ACP(Sup) responded that the same investigation process was adopted in all cases of discovery of dead bodies in public places. The police officer in charge would make necessary arrangements at the scene, such as diversion of traffic, establishing cordon and screening off the area/scene as appropriate, to enable the collection and preservation of evidence in connection with the case. He stressed that investigations would be conducted expeditiously to minimise disturbance to the public.

15. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that while he fully agreed that gathering evidence at the scene was important, he considered that a dead body should not be exposed in a public place for a long time. Dr KWOK asked whether the Police had issued any guidelines on the necessary investigations to be taken in these cases, and whether there were more effective ways to screen off the area when the investigation was carried out.

16. ACP(Sup) said that depending on the nature of each case, the duration of investigations would vary. For instance, it would take longer time to conduct door-to-door enquiries in a high-rise building. ACP(Sup) further said that the dead body was usually covered with a plastic sheet. If complicated investigation was necessary, the area surrounding the dead body would be screened off. The Police was actively considering providing officers at the scene with suitable shelters to cover the dead body.

17. Mr Vincent FANG considered that the DRTs had taken an unduly long time to remove the dead bodies in the three recent cases, when there were 10 DRTs and the workload was only five cases each day. He asked why the DRT staff could not be contacted when they were not in office, given the advance communication technology nowadays. Mr FANG believed that an injured person found in a public place with signs of life would be delivered to the hospital expeditiously. He hoped that a dead body found in a public place could also be removed expeditiously.

18. DD/FEHD explained that the 10 DRTs worked in three shifts round the clock, with three to four DRTs in a shift for the Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories regions. Apart from removing dead bodies found in public places, DRTs of FEHD were also responsible for collecting dead bodies from hospitals and the faculties of

Action

medicine of universities. The average number of cases handled by DRTs in a day in 2004 was about 20, and priority was given to cases referred by the Police. DD/FEHD added that to facilitate communication, each DRT was provided with a mobile phone. The DRT would set off to work as soon as possible after notification from the Police.

19. ACP(Sup) assured members that any injured persons found in public places would be conveyed to the nearby hospitals as quickly as possible. ACP(Sup) reiterated that while the Police would endeavour to complete the necessary investigations within the shortest time possible, the actual time required would vary depending on the individual circumstances of each case. ACP(Sup) further said that under the new arrangement, the Police would inform FEHD once the ambulance crew confirmed that the injured person had no signs of life. The departments concerned would take prompt actions to complete the dead removal process within the shortest time possible.

20. The Chairman considered it unacceptable to cover a dead body found in public place by a plastic sheet. He urged that the Administration to take prompt actions to provide the police officers at the scene with suitable shelters to cover the dead body. The Administration noted the comments.

IV Inspection and quarantine measures for import of potted plants and nursery stock

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 759/04-05(04)]

[LC Paper No. FS08/04-05]

21. Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DD/AFCD) briefed members on the latest developments of the recent discovery of imported red fire ants in Hong Kong and the measures taken to control red fire ants. DD/AFCD said that since 26 January 2005, a total of 282 mounds of red fire ants had been found in 12 sites to date. Most of the sites were new vegetation areas or grassland. DD/AFCD informed members that the Administration's strategy was to look out for traces of red fire ants as early as possible, carry out pest control measures, control the spread of red fire ants and enhance public awareness about red fire ants. To draw up an overall picture on the extent of possible spread of red fire ants in the territory, staff from relevant departments had been deployed to inspect those areas under their management and look out for traces of red fire ants. Any suspected ant mounds found would be eradicated promptly. All relevant information about red fire ants would be placed on the Government website.

22. DD/AFCD further said that it was suspected that the source of red fire ants was from those plants recently imported to Hong Kong, and more information about the sources of red fire ants would be available by the end of the week. An advisory group comprising local academics and experts had been formed, and it would meet on 2 February 2005. AFCD would also study the ecological impact of the red fire ants and

Action

the pesticides to be used. DD/AFCD added that overseas experience revealed that red fire ants could not be totally eradicated within a short period of time. Discussions with overseas experts would be held whenever necessary.

Inspection and quarantine control of imported plants

23. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry, DD/AFCD said that following the recent discovery of red fire ants, the Mainland authorities had stepped up their inspection and quarantine measures of potted plants and nursery stock for supply to Hong Kong, and AFCD had also strengthened the inspection and quarantine measures of these plants imported from the Mainland. DD/AFCD further said that the Administration would closely monitor the developments and review whether such inspection and quarantine measures should be put in place on a long-term basis.

24. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that since more than 200 ant mounds had been found in Hong Kong, he believed that red fire ants should have arrived in Hong Kong for some time. Dr KWOK noted that plants produced in and imported from the Mainland did not require a Plant Import Licence under the Plant (Importation and Pest Control) Ordinance (Cap. 207), and soil imported from the Mainland was also exempted from inspection and quarantine control. Dr KWOK asked whether the Administration would review Cap. 207 with a view to stepping up the inspection and quarantine control of plants and soil imported from the Mainland. Dr KWOK further asked, pending the legislative amendments, whether the Administration would issue guidelines on the inspection and quarantine measures to be taken on plants and soil imported from the Mainland at the border control points.

25. DS(FEH) explained that Cap. 207 was enacted many years ago. As Hong Kong practised free trade and our economy did not rely on primary production, there was no stringent regulatory control for imported plants, especially those from the Mainland. DS(FEH) said that having regard to the recent discovery of imported red fire ants in Hong Kong, the Administration would consider conducting a review on Cap. 207 on plant regulations, and the trade would be consulted in due course.

26. DD/AFCD said that to facilitate the study of the scope of legislative amendments required, AFCD was conducting an overall assessment of the impact of red fire ants on plants and human. The Administration would also make reference to overseas experience in tackling the problem of red fire ants. DD/AFCD further said that the Administration would fully consult the trade before deciding whether and how Cap. 207 would be amended. The Administration would revert to the Panel on the legislative proposals, if so required. DS(FEH) added that pending the review on Cap. 207, potted plants or nursery stocks imported from the Mainland would be sent to the nurseries or Ta Kwu Ling Government Farm for inspection first. The Administration would closely monitor the development and review whether the arrangements for inspection could be relaxed at a later stage.

Action

27. Dr KWOK Ka-ki asked whether the Administration had information or conducted studies on the potential risks of importing plants from the Mainland and other places. He was concerned that other pests or germs which were harmful to human health would be brought into Hong Kong through the imported plants or soil. He urged the Administration to take preventive measures in this regard.

28. DD/AFCD responded that AFCD was not aware of any other risks accompanying plants imported from the Mainland at the moment. He said that AFCD had maintained close contact with the relevant authorities in the Mainland on pest infestation.

29. Mr Vincent FANG said that if the potted plants imported from the Mainland before 16 January 2005 were already subject to the inspection and quarantine measures, the discovery of red fire ants in Hong Kong would show that there were still loopholes in the control measures. However, if these measures were introduced only after 16 January 2005, he believed that such measures could reasonably safeguard the quality of imported potted plants.

30. DS(FEH) confirmed that prior to 17 January 2005, potted plants imported from the Mainland were not subject to inspection and quarantine control.

Measures to control red fire ants

31. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the Administration should educate the public about the red fire ants, in order to allay any unnecessary fear among the public. He also cautioned on the adverse impact on the environment if excessive pesticide was to be used in eradicating the red fire ants.

32. DS(FEH) said that the Government had published publicity pamphlets and posters on “what to do” when red fire ants were discovered and to provide health advice on stings by red fire ants. Announcements in the Public Interest were also under preparation to reinforce public education.

33. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that according to press reports, red fire ants were found in Wuchuan in Zhanjiang, but not other parts of Guangdong. As Wuchuan was farther away from Hong Kong, he asked whether the Administration had studied how red fire ants were imported into Hong Kong. Mr TAM further asked whether the Administration had traced the sources of plants on new vegetation areas in Hong Kong, in order to better control the spread of red fire ants.

34. DD/AFCD said that the proliferation of red fire ants would depend on the availability of suitable habitat, i.e. soil, and they could travel a long distance in soil or plants with roots and soil attached. To control the spread of red fire ants, the relevant government departments had been urged to look out for traces of red fire ants in areas under their management. It was likely that more ant mounds would be identified.

Action

DD/AFCD further said that according to available information, plants on new vegetation areas were mainly imported from Guangdong. The Administration had conveyed such information to the Mainland authorities in order to trace the planters. DD/AFCD assured members that with proper disinfection, the imported plants should be free from red fire ants.

35. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that to better control the spread of red fire ants, the Administration should improve communication with the Mainland experts and make reference to overseas experience in combating the problem. DD/AFCD responded that specimens of suspected red fire ants had been sent to experts in Japan, the United Kingdom and the Mainland for identification, and Mainland's experts had confirmed that the specimen of ants was red fire ants. The Administration would also make reference to overseas experience in combating the problem.

36. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the Administration should address the public concerns about the red fire ants, and advise the public whether they should buy potted plants for the Lunar New Year. Mr WONG also asked about the respective measures taken by government departments to control red fire ants.

37. The Chairman asked about the discovery of ant mounds at Tin Yan Estate in Tin Shui Wai.

38. DD/AFCD said that the Government had already published publicity pamphlets and posters about red fire ants. DD/AFCD further said that as both the Mainland and Hong Kong had stepped up inspection and quarantine control measures on potted plants, these plants should be free from red fire ants. He added that no abnormalities had been detected in the imported potted plants and local nurseries under AFCD's inspection.

39. Regarding the measures to control red fire ants, Assistant Director of Housing (Estate Management) 1 said that more than 800 estate management staff of the Housing Department had been mobilised to step up daily inspection of public rental housing estates, including flower beds, flower pots and potted plants, with special focus on new vegetation areas. Suspected ant mounds were found at Tin Yan Estate in Tin Shui Wai, and the suspected case had been reported to AFCD for follow-up actions. Notices had also been put up at estate offices and lift lobbies of housing blocks, and announcements had been made through the Housing Channel at the LCD monitors installed in the lift lobbies of domestic blocks to remind tenants to spray pesticides or ask for help if any traces of red fire ants were found. Health advice on stings by red fire ants was also provided to tenants.

40. Assistant Director of Lands (Estate Management) 1 said that more than 100 staff of the Lands Department had inspected over 600 sites, and that only six suspected ant mounds had been found.

Action

41. Deputy Director of Home Affairs (1) said that apart from mobilising over 200 staff to patrol areas under the management of the Home Affairs Department, the department had instructed its contractors with ongoing minor works contracts to inspect all their work sites. Village representatives, especially those from Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai, had also been requested to report ant mounds found in their villages. Publicity leaflets were also distributed through the district offices.

Notification system between Hong Kong and the Mainland

42. Mr WONG Kwok-hing believed that red fire ants should have arrived in Hong Kong for some time. Mr WONG criticised that the notification system between Hong Kong and the Mainland was defective, and he asked the present notification system could be improved to enhance the control of pest infestation and disease brought about by plants and animals.

43. In response to Mr WONG criticism, DS(FEH) said that red fire ants in the Mainland were discovered only recently. Upon receiving reports by the trade on 17 January 2005 that potted plants destined for Hong Kong for the Lunar New Year were stranded in Guangdong, the Administration had immediately activated the notification system and enquired the situation with the relevant inspection and quarantine authorities in the Mainland. On 24 January 2005, the Administration received notification from the People's Government of Shenzhen Municipality that red fire ants were found in Wuchuan of Guangdong, and the relevant Mainland authorities had strengthened the control on plants for export to Hong Kong. DS(FEH) further said that there was an established notification system between Hong Kong and the Mainland on inspection and quarantine issues. Hong Kong had agreed with the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine that both sides would hold annual meetings attended by high-level officials to discuss policy issues. There were also exchanges between Hong Kong and the relevant authorities (such as Guangdong, Shenzhen and Zhuhai) on technical and operational matters three to four times a year.

44. As regards the communication between Hong Kong and the Mainland on the discovery of red fire ants, DS(FEH) agreed that there was room for improvement. He pointed out that as plants produced in and imported from the Mainland did not require a Plant Import Licence, the recent incident was the first occasion on which the notification system concerning control of plants was activated. He added that previous emphasis was given to food safety matters, for example, whether certain food animals or food products were unsafe for human consumption. After this incident, the Administration had held further discussion with the relevant Mainland authorities, and both sides had agreed to further strengthen the existing communication mechanism on control of plants.

Action

45. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked why the Administration did not take any action until 24 January 2005, as reports were received from the trade as early as 17 January 2005 that potted plants were stranded in Guangdong.

46. DS(FEH) responded that the Administration had made enquiries with the relevant authorities in Beijing and Guangdong between 17 and 24 January 2005. The Administration was notified on 24 January 2005 that red fire ants were found in Wuchuan and that control on plants for export to Hong Kong was strengthened.

47. Mr Andrew CHENG expressed doubt about the effectiveness of the notification system between Hong Kong and the Mainland. He pointed out that there were press reports in the Mainland on strengthened control measures of plants for export to Hong Kong between 17 and 24 January 2005, but Hong Kong received the information from the Mainland authorities only on 24 January 2005. Mr CHENG expressed concern that the Administration had been very passive and had not taken the initiative to verify the press reports with the Mainland authorities.

48. DS(FEH) reiterated that upon receiving reports by the trade on 17 January 2005, the Administration had immediately activated the notification system to enquire the situation with the Mainland authorities. He said that the mechanism had operated satisfactorily and there was no problem in communicating with the Mainland authorities on inspection and quarantine matters. As he had explained earlier at the meeting, the notification system between Hong Kong and the Mainland previously placed more emphasis on outbreaks of infectious diseases, inspection/quarantine of food animal and food safety matters. This was the first occasion that the notification system was activated on matters relating to plant inspection and quarantine. Both sides had now agreed to further improve and strengthen the existing communication mechanism.

49. DS(FEH) further said that he was not in the position to comment on the reports of newspapers. The Administration would act on information supplied by the trade, the public or the Mainland authorities for taking appropriate actions on plants imported from the Mainland, and the trade were kept informed of the latest developments.

50. Mr Andrew CHENG said that he could not accept the saying that the notification system was operating satisfactorily. Mr CHENG pointed out that a notice about the discovery of the red fire ants in Wuchuan in Zhanjiang had been posted on the Ministry of Agriculture's website on 17 January 2005. However, the Administration only learned about it from the Mainland authorities on 24 January 2005. This had fully demonstrated the inadequacies of the notification system. Mr CHENG further said that according to a newspaper report dated 25 January 2005, officials from the Guangdong Province had stated that as the quarantine authorities of Shenzhen Municipality reported directly to the Central Government, it was not appropriate for the Guangdong authorities to notify Hong Kong of the discovery of

Action

red fire ants in Shenzhen. Mr CHENG held the view that the delay in notification had attributed to the spread of red fire ants in Hong Kong. Mr CHENG asked whether the Administration had conveyed to the Central Government the inadequacies of the notification system with a view to improving the communication between Hong Kong and the relevant authorities.

51. DS(FEH) said that representatives of the Shenzhen authorities were also present when he met with the Mainland authorities on 28 January 2005 in Beijing. He was not aware that the Shenzhen or other Mainland authorities had problems with the notification system. DS(FEH) stressed that the Administration had already made enquiries with the Mainland authorities at the earliest opportunity. Nevertheless, he agreed that both sides could further improve their communication.

52. The Chairman asked whether there was any established channel for direct communication between Hong Kong and the Guangdong authorities. DS(FEH) said that the Administration maintained close liaison with the relevant authorities in Guangdong, Shenzhen and Zhuhai on operational matters concerning border control and inspection and quarantine measures. They had agreed to further strengthen the communication with Hong Kong especially on important issues.

53. Mr TAM Yiu-chung sought clarification whether the existing communication mechanism covered pest infestation.

54. DS(FEH) responded that inspection and quarantine measures for animals and plants were within the scope of the notification system.

55. Mr WONG Yung-kan commented that the Mainland authorities were always slow or reluctant to pass on information to Hong Kong, while the latter always updated the Mainland on new developments. He agreed with other members that it was important to enhance the communication between Hong Kong and the Mainland on plant inspection and quarantine issues.

56. Mr Vincent FANG said that it was a pity that the Administration had to rely on information from the Mainland authorities, as Hong Kong played a rather passive role under the existing notification system. Despite reports from the trade on 17 January 2005 that potted plants from the Mainland were stranded in Guangdong, the Administration did not know exactly what happened until 24 January 2005. Since there was wide press coverage on the discovery of red fire ants in the Mainland, he considered that the Administration should take a more proactive approach, and make enquiries with the Mainland authorities immediately when there were press reports about pest infestation and infectious diseases which might affect Hong Kong.

Action

57. DS(FEH) responded that it must always be remembered that the Mainland authorities had taken immediate steps to protect Hong Kong from being affected by the red fire ants by instituting quarantine measures for potted plants and trees destined for Hong Kong. DS(FEH) reiterated that the recent discovery of red fire ants was a new problem, and the Administration and the Mainland authorities had agreed to further improve and strengthen the existing communication mechanism. DS(FEH) stressed that the Administration would take appropriate actions upon receipt of relevant reports.

58. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the Administration should put in place an alert system to warn the trade about possible pest infestation at the earliest stage.

59. Mr Andrew CHENG said that although the Administration had repeatedly pledged to improve the existing notification mechanism between Hong Kong and the Mainland authorities, the Administration had not provided details of the specific improvement measures. Mr CHENG requested the Administration to provide a paper to the Panel on the improvement measures to be adopted by both sides. The Administration agreed.

Admin

V Anti-mosquito campaign in 2004 and dengue vector surveillance in 2005

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 759/04-05(06)]

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 362/04-05(06)]

60. Members noted the paper provided by the Administration and did not raise any questions.

VI Population-based food consumption survey 2005

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 759/04-05(05)]

61. Dr KWOK Ka-ki asked about the estimated cost and objectives for conducting the population-based food consumption survey.

62. Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication)/FEHD said that the survey was to obtain up-to-date information on the food consumption patterns of Hong Kong people. Such information would be useful for the Government in formulating policies on enhancing food safety and targeting education strategies to promote food safety in Hong Kong. The survey contract had been awarded to the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2004. The preparatory work and pilot study would be completed in early 2005, and the fieldwork of the survey would start in March 2005. It was expected that the whole survey would be completed by March 2006, and a written report would be compiled and released by the end of 2006. As regards the cost for conducting the survey, the Administration would provide the information after the meeting.

Admin

Action

(Post-meeting note : The Administration has subsequently advised that the provision of the population-based food consumption survey was contracted out through an open tender in late 2003. The contract was awarded to the Chinese University of Hong Kong in March 2004 at a total tender price of \$3.2 million.)

63. Dr KWOK Ka-ki added that the Administration might consider obtaining information on the expenditure patterns of Hong Kong people on food consumption.

VII Any other business

64. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:35 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
28 February 2005