

**立法會**  
***Legislative Council***

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**Meeting of Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
on 12 July 2005**

**Background Brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat**

**Problem of Ciguatera Poisoning**

**Purpose**

This paper summarises the discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on measures to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning.

**Past outbreaks**

2. According to the information provided by the Administration, there were 75 reported cases of ciguatera poisoning with 233 people affected during the period from 2000 to 2003. Up to 15 October 2004, there were 51 ciguatera poisoning cases with 215 persons affected.

**Previous discussions by the Panel**

Measures to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning

3. In view of the increasing number of cases in March 2004, the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene held a meeting on 2 April 2004 to discuss with the Administration the monitoring and control system on ciguatera and preventive measures.

4. At the meeting on 2 April 2004, members expressed concern whether the problematic coral fish came from one single supplier or from a new fishing area. They urged the Administration to identify the source of the toxic fish and to require coral fish to undergo ciguatoxin testing prior to importation.

5. The Administration advised that it was difficult to trace the source of coral fish as they were not confined to particular places. At present, there was no legislation regulating the landing of live marine fish in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had advised the trade that coral fish from new fishing areas should be checked for ciguatoxin prior to importation to Hong Kong, and FEHD would conduct random sampling tests on ciguatoxin. The Administration also informed the Panel that it was reviewing the existing legislation to extend regulatory control to live fish.

6. Pending the completion of the Administration's review, the Panel urged the Administration to take interim measures to improve the situation and to actively discuss with the trade the following suggestions –

- (a) requiring ciguatoxin tests of coral fish coming from new fishing areas prior to importation; and
- (b) strengthening the voluntary reporting system and sampling requirements for coral reef fish.

Some members also urged the Administration to strengthen public education on prevention of ciguatera poisoning, in particular how to differentiate marine fish from cultured fish as the latter was safe to eat.

#### Introduction of a Code of Practice

7. The Administration subsequently informed the Panel, at the meeting on 13 July 2004, the proposed measures to enhance the monitoring and control system on ciguatera. The Administration advised that it would adopt a two-phased approach to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning at an early stage. As it took time to review the existing legislation to improve the regulatory control, a voluntary Code of Practice would be developed in the meantime. Under the Code of Practice, the fish traders would be required to provide information on each lot of fish catch.

8. At the Panel meeting, some members expressed concern whether the fish traders would have difficulties in complying with the proposed reporting system. The Administration advised that the information to be reported was not complicated, and the fish traders were aware that any ciguatera poisoning cases would adversely affect their business. Moreover, the Administration would develop the Code of Practice in consultation with the fish trading industry.

9. Hon WONG Yung-kan informed the Panel that the fishing trade supported advance ciguatera testing of the fish catches prior to importation and strengthening the reporting of fish catches to FEHD. A few other members preferred a compulsory reporting system to provide more reliable information and effective control over imported fish. However, Hon Tommy CHEUNG did not support enacting more legislation to regulate and control commercial activities.

10. The Panel requested the Administration to further discuss with the fish traders the voluntary Code of Practice. Members also suggested that –

- (a) more sample tests be conducted on coral fish catches, particularly large fishes and those from new fishing grounds, prior to their importation to Hong Kong;
- (b) consignments involving a large quantity of fish or large fish exceeding a certain weight should be subject to ciguatera testing prior to importation; and
- (c) the Administration should strengthen public education on prevention of ciguatera poisoning.

#### Further measures to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning

11. In September 2004, there was again a cluster of ciguatera poisoning cases. The Panel discussed with the Administration on 26 October 2004 the remedial actions taken by the Administration and the trade, and the longer-term measures to prevent recurrence of such incidents. The Administration informed the Panel that it had met with the fish traders to discuss the draft Code of Practice. The Administration envisaged that the Code of Practice could be finalised by the end of 2004 for implementation in early 2005.

12. On the longer-term measures, the Administration had advised that it would explore the feasibility of empowering relevant government departments to strengthen control of the import and sale of live marine fish, i.e. establishing designated landing points and requiring import permits for coral fish. The purpose of these enhanced measures was to address the problem of ciguatera poisoning, rather than to penalise the retailers or food premises for selling contaminated fish. These measures sought to ensure that the trade would report critical information related to the import and distribution of fish, in order to facilitate FEHD to trace the sources of contaminated fish and to dispose of the fish when there were reported incidents of ciguatera fish poisoning. The Administration reiterated that it would review the existing regulations on fish and explore ways to enhance the regulation of fish as a whole.

13. While members generally supported the Code of Practice, they urged the Administration to take enforcement actions against supply of problematic coral fish. The Panel Chairman also expressed concern that although a voluntary reporting system for coral fish had been established as early as 1998, there were still problems of ciguatera poisoning. Members requested the Administration to expedite the promulgation of the Code of Practice.

14. At the meeting on 14 December 2004, the Administration informed the Panel that the fish trading associations and catering associations had expressed support for the voluntary Code of Practice which would be implemented from 15 December 2004. The Administration undertook to review the effectiveness of the Code of Practice, and report to the Panel in six months' time.

15. Hon WONG Yung-kan also informed members that the problem of ciguatera poisoning was mainly caused by the import of coral fish from certain new fishing areas. In developing the Code of Practice, the fish trading industry had reached agreement with the Administration on many issues. The industry had also suggested that the Administration should conduct sample tests on coral fish catches prior to import and expedite the testing process.

16. The Administration responded at the meeting that conducting ciguatera testing on samples of large coral fish was not reliable. It would be more appropriate to control the problem at source by controlling the import of certain coral reef fish from high-risk areas. The Administration was studying the proposed mandatory measures and would revert to the Panel later.

#### Recent development

17. The Administration will provide a progress report on the implementation of the Code of Practice, for the Panel meeting on 12 July 2005.

#### **Relevant papers**

18. A list of relevant papers and documents is in the Appendix for members' easy reference. The papers and documents are available on the Research and Library Services Information System and the Council's website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/english/index.htm>.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
6 July 2005

## **Appendix**

### **Relevant Papers/Documents**

<b><u>Meeting</u></b>	<b><u>Meeting Date</u></b>	<b><u>Papers/Motion Passed/Council Question</u></b>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	2 April 2004	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 1923/03-04(01)  Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2) 2777/03-04]
	13 July 2004	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 3051/03-04(01)  Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2)3271/03-04]
	26 October 2004	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 75/04-05(06)  Background brief prepared by LegCo Secretariat –Paper No. CB(2) 75/04-05(07)  Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2) 289/04-05]
	14 December 2004	Administration's paper - Paper No. CB(2) 362/04-05(07)  Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2) 564/04-05]