

Press Release

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Transcript of media session by SHWF on malachite green

Following is the transcript (English portion) of a media session by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, Dr York Chow, after talking on radio programmes this morning (August 22):

Reporter: Malachite green has been around in fish for a long time and we have not known about it. Is it possible for the Government to know the problem earlier?

Dr Chow: I agree that this phenomenon might have existed for some time before it was discovered recently. As far as we know, the substance was banned in many countries including the Mainland, the European Union, Canada and the United States. Hong Kong did not actually put it as a banned substance mainly because we do not have that much fish farming. All the fish farming was monitored by our Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department's specialists. They have advised our fishermen not to use those substances for some years. So, in a way, we were complacent regarding this substance.

Reporter: But it is banned in the Mainland as well?

Dr Chow: That's right.

Reporter: How do you ensure fish that we are eating now are safe when we don't have a ban from Mainland imported fish?

Dr Chow: That is the reason why we will be putting this into law, hopefully by Friday this week. After that, it will be a prohibited substance in food, including live fish. In that case, we can actually exercise our jurisdiction to confiscate fish that contain malachite green.

Reporter: (Loopholes in communication system)

Dr Chow: I think the main problem with this particular incident is: we learnt of this incident through other sources rather than directly from the central authority. We only received the notice from the Mainland on the 17th of August and, of course, we started action the next day. The reason that I think we have to understand is that China is a big country and many of the internal policies, particularly in the provinces, would not be directly communicated to Hong Kong. That is the reason why we are sending two of our officials to China this morning to enquire whether we can set up a different type of mechanism so that we can directly discuss with Guangdong and some of our neighbouring provinces [issues] regarding our food safety on a regular basis.

Reporter: Why is there still no ban on Mainland freshwater fish even though the samples are malachite green positive. I mean, seven samples out of 19. It is not a very low percentage, more than 30.

Dr Chow: At the moment, we do not include malachite green in our law. As I said earlier, not until Friday when the law is implemented, we will not have the authority to exercise this particular jurisdiction.

(Please also refer to the [Chinese](#) portion of the transcript)

Ends/Monday, August 22, 2005

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