

To: Mrs Constance Li
Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
From: Professor TH Lam, Chair Professor and Head of Department
Department of Community Medicine, School of Public Health
University of Hong Kong
Date: 4 January 2006

Written submission

1. We strongly welcome the reorganisation proposal to enhance food safety and protect public health.
2. We are in full agreement with the proposed separation of regulatory functions from facilitation functions.
3. The setting up of a Centre for Food Safety should provide enhanced opportunities for a more focussed approach to controlling and regulating food safety and ultimately developing sound evidence-based food policies in Hong Kong. The reorganisation will provide a strong message to the public about the Government's responsibility for and commitment to the protection of public health and quality of life.
4. We welcome the emphasis on a multidisciplinary approach. However, as stated in the proposal, this apparently only focuses on a multidisciplinary approach within the Government. We believe this will not maximise the use of available expertise and opportunities for enhanced policy formulation. We therefore suggest the multidisciplinary approach should be broadened and should include non-governmental professional and academic organisations.
5. We particularly welcome the emphasis on risk assessment and communication. In the University of Hong Kong School of Public Health, we have started a new research programme on risk perception and communication with a special focus on food safety and risk communication and we would like to build up collaboration with the new Centre to assist the development of this important area.

6. We note that in the proposal there is not much discussion on collaboration with academic institutions, such as the universities, especially in terms of professional and postgraduate training, and in collaborative research. There is also no mention of the funding requirements to pursue such training and research programmes. We believe this is an important omission that needs to be rectified.

7. Government policies need to be guided and supported by good evidence from research and evaluation and the universities can provide independent scientific expertise and consultancy. We hope that the Government will recognise this and provide funding to support related research and development, and to strengthen government-university collaboration and partnership.

8. We note that most, if not all, of the additional resources needed are for manpower. However, we suggest that separate funding to support research and development and other collaboration should be made available. We recommend the setting up of a research fund to support new research on food safety, risk assessment and communication, behaviour surveillance and evaluation. We also recommend joint government-university appointment of professional (especially public health) staff in some strategic areas, such as risk assessment and communication and community intervention trials.