

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
for Examination of the 2007-08 Draft Estimates
to be held on 21 March 2007**

Food and Environmental Hygiene

Madam Chairman and Honorable Members,

The work of Health, Welfare and Food Bureau is intimately linked with people's livelihood. Our work in respect of food and environmental hygiene is integral to the daily lives of the general public. In the Estimates for the coming year, about \$4,600 million has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio for Food and Environmental Hygiene. The services are mainly delivered by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, and Government Laboratory. There is an additional provision of about \$500 million, which is mainly intended for enhancing overall food safety, stepping up preventive measures against avian influenza and meeting operation expenses for new facilities.

2. The work of food and environmental hygiene covers a multitude of issues. I shall highlight three main focus areas, namely: (1) enhancing food safety; (2) continuing to stay vigilant to guard against avian influenza outbreak; and (3) formulating long-term direction and goals for fisheries industry.

Food Safety

3. The Centre for Food Safety, established in May last year, is committed to implementing initiatives for food safety and stepping up efforts in disseminating food safety information to the public. At present, we are reviewing the work strategy and future direction of the Centre for Food Safety. The review will be

completed in a few months' time and we will report the review result to the Legislative Council.

4. We are also working on a completely new food safety bill to extend the scope of regulation to a variety of food, including farmed aquatic produce, vegetables and fruits. We plan to amend the existing legislation to regulate imported poultry eggs. The new legislation will provide for the registration of food importers and traders as well as mandatory ban on the sale of problem food to ensure that imported food will comply with our safety standards. Moreover, we will continue to work on the legislative proposal for nutrition labelling. The bill will be submitted to the Legislative Council later this year.

Prevention against Avian Influenza

5. Prevention against avian influenza is another main thrust of the Bureau. We will:

- (1) continue to limit the population of local poultry flock to 2 million or less;
- (2) continue to ban backyard poultry keeping;
- (3) propose amendment legislation to provide for the registration of poultry egg importers and to stipulate that imported poultry eggs must be accompanied with health certificates to ensure that the eggs come from avian influenza free areas;
- (4) deter smuggling of poultry and related products by travellers and Hong Kong residents through deploying quarantine detector dogs introduced by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and Centre for Food Safety at ports of entry;

- (5) step up surveillance against illegally imported birds, continue to closely monitor avian influenza infection amongst wild birds, and draw up contingency measures to prevent the spread of the virus; and
- (6) set up a poultry slaughtering and processing plant at the identified site in Sheung Shui and invite open tender from the private sector to develop the project. The plant will commence operation in 2009-10.

Long-term Development of Fisheries Industry

6. We have formed a committee comprising representatives from the fisheries industry, academics and experts to formulate proposals that would balance the objectives of conserving fisheries resources and sustaining the development of the industry and to set down the long-term direction and goals for local fisheries industry.

7. Madam Chairman, this concludes my opening remarks. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer questions from Members.

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