

Motion Debate on
“Rebuilding the local agriculture and fisheries industries”
at the Legislative Council Meeting on 5 March 2008
Progress Report

Purpose

At the sitting of the Legislative Council on 5 March 2008, the motion on “Rebuilding the local agriculture and fisheries industries” was passed. The motion urges the Government to adopt various measures to promote the sustainable development of local agriculture and fisheries industries. This paper reports to Members on the actions taken by the Government to follow up on the proposals made in the motion debate and the latest progress of the work of the Government to foster the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fisheries industries.

Zoning of designated areas for exclusive use by the agriculture and fisheries industries

2. Under the existing Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131), substantial area of land has been zoned for agriculture (including pond fish culture industry) uses. Unless prior approval from the Town Planning Board is obtained, the land uses cannot be changed. As regards the mariculture industry, 26 fish culture zones have been designated in the waters of Hong Kong under the Marine Fish Culture Ordinance (Cap. 353).

Assisting the industries in developing quality brand names

3. Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has implemented the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme and the Accredited Farm Scheme to encourage good husbandry practices with a view to helping the public to identify quality and safe agricultural and fishery products and enhancing consumer confidence in the quality of the products. Since their implementation, both schemes have received support from the agriculture and fisheries industries and the general public. Currently a total of 193 farms and 71 fish farms have participated in the schemes. AFCD, the Fish Marketing Organization and the Vegetable Marketing

Organization will continue to organise publicity and marketing activities for quality local agricultural and fishery products to help the industries develop quality brand names.

Promoting leisure agriculture and fishery trades

4. AFCD introduced a scheme in 2002 to allow fish farmers to run leisure fishing business at their fish rafts. So far, 11 fish culture zones and 33 licencees have been given approval to organise leisure fishing activities at fish rafts. Apart from leisure fishing activities, individual licencees have recently hosted exhibitions to present the traditional culture of fishing folks at their fish farms, thus successfully creating a tourist attraction with special characteristics. AFCD will continue to assist fishermen in using their fishing vessels to develop leisure fishing activities, particularly fishing vessels whose owners want to transform their operations. In collaboration with the Marine Department, it will also study the feasibility of using fishing vessels to carry passengers for leisure fishing activities and related technical and safety issues. In respect of leisure agriculture, there are about 27 leisure farms in Hong Kong, mainly located in the rural parts of the territory, such as Fanling and Yuen Long. AFCD will continue to provide assistance to farmers in various areas including rehabilitation of agricultural land, installation of irrigation facilities, provision of technical assistance and facilitation of communication between farmers and other departments. Moreover, the Government has produced publications promoting eco-tourism, in order to enhance public interest in eco-tourism and leisure agriculture.

Supporting the industries in technique upgrading and professional training

5. To provide training for professionals in the local agriculture and fisheries industries, AFCD introduces new agriculture and aquaculture techniques to farmers and fish farmers through regular technical talks and on-farm demonstrations, as well as distribution of advisory leaflets. Overseas study tours are also arranged for farmers and fishermen from time to time to enhance their knowledge in the development of the agriculture and fisheries industries in other places of the world. This year, subsidised by the Vegetable Marketing Organization, a delegation of

local vegetable farmers will visit Malaysia for sharing experience with their counterparts there. In order to help fishermen to switch to other employment and to upgrade their aquaculture techniques, the Government will organise a one-year aquaculture professional (tertiary) training course through the Guangdong Ocean University, as well as jointly organising a short-term training course on grouper hatching with the Network of Aquaculture Centres in Asia-Pacific for fishermen in Hong Kong. AFCD has consulted the trade and the Marine Fish Scholarship Fund Advisory Committee on the arrangements and contents of the courses and begun to accept applications from interested fishermen since 23 April 2008. If necessary, AFCD will discuss with other educational institutes in organising other courses, such as those on offshore fisheries, leisure fishing activities, fisheries product processing and logistics.

6. In upgrading the techniques of the industry, AFCD provides technical support services and training courses in the development of highly effective fish culture methods and improved culture techniques. It introduces improved culture techniques and good management practices to fish farmers through organisation of seminars, talks, on-farm demonstrations and distribution of advisory leaflets. AFCD is committed to assist local fish farmers in developing fry hatching and breeding techniques and plans to set up an experimental hatchery to provide the necessary technical support and training to local fish farmers, with a view to assisting them to develop the techniques concerned. AFCD also continues to organise various technical talks and on-farm demonstrations for farmers to introduce improved species of agricultural products and new farming techniques.

Providing emergency relief to the industries

7. The Government has put in place the mechanism and procedures for providing emergency relief to farmers and fishermen affected by natural disasters. Emergency relief will be provided on the principle of equity to help them resume operations as early as possible.

8. The cold spell in early February this year has affected the products of some farmers and fishermen, particularly those of the fish

farmers. In view of this, AFCD had activated the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) immediately to disburse primary producer grants to affected fish farmers as a financial relief. To address the situation, AFCD and the Social Welfare Department had sought the approval of the ERF Committee to provide further relief to the fish farmers affected by offering them a special grant from the ERF. AFCD has received a total of 826 applications from mariculturists and 101 from pond fish farmers. The special grants have been provided to eligible fish farmers. In respect of providing loans to assist fish farmers to resume operations, AFCD offers low-interest loans to them through the Kadoorie Agriculture Aid Loan Fund. As at 22 April 2008, four loan applications have been received.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Health Bureau
May 2008