

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
for Examination of the 2008-09 Draft Estimates
on 3 April 2008**

Food and Environmental Hygiene

Chairman and Honorable Members,

The Food and Health Bureau is committed to ensuring food safety and environmental hygiene with a view to promoting public health and improving people's quality of life. In the 2008-09 Estimates, about \$4,800 million has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food and Environmental Hygiene". The relevant services are mainly delivered by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Government Laboratory. There is an additional provision of about \$450 million, which is mainly intended for the various measures to enhance food safety.

2. The work in the food and environmental hygiene portfolio encompasses a wide range of issues which are intimately linked with people's livelihood. Today I will highlight a number of major initiatives to be implemented in the coming year, including those on food safety, the prevention and control of avian influenza, the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, as well as our work in relation to the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events.

Food Safety

3. We will introduce the *Food Safety Bill* to incorporate new food safety control tools to enhance the public's confidence in food safety. Last December, I explained the details of the *Food Safety Bill* to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene and responses from Members had been positive. We are engaging the public and stakeholders on our proposals. We will listen carefully to the views of the trade and the community and seek to facilitate the trade as far as possible in drawing up the legislation, so as to minimize any disruption. We plan to submit the Bill to the Legislative Council in the 2008-09 legislative session.

4. Regarding the food nutrition labelling regulation, we have had extensive consultation and communication with stakeholders over the past few years. The Amendment Regulation was published in the Gazette today. We will table the Amendment Regulation in the Legislative Council on 9 April. The Administration's proposal is to require all prepackaged food to label energy and seven core nutrients. The food nutrition labelling legislation will not only help the public in making informed food choices, but also prohibit misleading or deceptive nutrition labels and claims, thus protecting the rights of consumers. While safeguarding public health and consumer rights, we will endeavour to reduce the impact on the trade and to facilitate the public to continue to enjoy foods from all over the world.

5. We have been closely monitoring overseas development on food safety standards and have updated our existing legislation from time to time in line with the international trend in the regulation of food safety. We are working on amendments to the *Colouring Matter in Food Regulations* and the *Preservatives in Food Regulations* and plan to table the amendment regulations in the Legislative Council within the current legislative session. We have

completed a public consultation on the proposed regulatory framework for pesticide residues in food.

6. In addition, to ensure a steady food supply to Hong Kong, we will continue to maintain close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities, (including the Ministry of Commerce, the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine as well as the Guangdong Provincial Government), in order to assess the latest situation and disseminate up-to-date information to the public. We will also continue to liaise with food suppliers to discuss measures to maintain a stable food supply to Hong Kong.

Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza

7. On the prevention and control of avian influenza, all Government departments will remain highly vigilant and strictly enforce the preventive and control measures against avian influenza. We will also maintain close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities for effective prevention and control of the disease. In the past few months, we have consulted the poultry trade and the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on our project of developing a poultry slaughtering and processing plant. We are now carefully considering the views collected, including views on the future operation mode of the plant, in order to work out a proposal that will best serve the public interest and also facilitate the trade. We will continue to liaise with the live poultry trade and assist as far as possible all those practitioners who wish to switch to the chilled and freshly slaughtered chicken business.

Sustainable Development of the Fisheries Industry

8. On the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, we have set up the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries, which comprises Legislative Councillors, representatives from the fisheries industry, academics and experts, to formulate feasible 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 the local fisheries industry. The Committee expects to submit its report to the Government in the latter half of the year.

Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events

9. We will also strive to effectively carry out our work on food safety and animal inspection and quarantine in the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events. We will actively collaborate with the Home Affairs Bureau and the Equestrian Company in the preparatory work. We will, through our concerted efforts, ensure the successful staging of the Equestrian Events in Hong Kong.

10. Chairman, these are the highlights of our major initiatives. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer questions from Members connected to food and environmental hygiene in the Estimates.