

**For discussion
on 17 October 2008**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Policy Initiatives of
Food and Health Bureau for 2009**

Purpose

This paper elaborates on the new initiative set out in the 2009 Policy Agenda in relation to the work of this bureau on food safety and environmental hygiene, and gives a brief account of the progress of implementing the on-going initiatives in past Policy Agenda.

2009 Policy Agenda

Quality City and Quality Life

Mission and Vision

2. The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is committed to formulating relevant policies to build a healthy society in Hong Kong. On the food safety and environmental hygiene fronts, we will continue to ensure food safety and provide a clean and hygienic environment to promote public health and raise the living standard of our citizens.

Strategy

3. Our strategy is to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach in food chain management (i.e. the implementation of the “From Feed to Table” concept) by putting in place a coherent, effective and dynamic food safety policy, and to ensure food safety through strengthening import control, food surveillance and mandating record keeping by traders to facilitate food tracing.

New Initiative

- (a) *Introduce a Bill to amend the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance to empower the authorities to where necessary issue orders to prohibit the import and sale of problem food and order a recall of problem food.*

4. The Administration has been working on a proposed Food Safety Bill to introduce new food safety control tools for the better protection of public health. The Bill will include, amongst others, powers for the Authority to make orders to prohibit the import and sale of problem food and order a recall of such food. The recent incident of detecting melamine in milk and dairy products has triggered calls for the Authority to have powers to mandate prohibition of the sale of problem food and its recall. We have therefore expedited work on this part of the Food Safety Bill and proposed to urgently amend the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) accordingly, ahead of the introduction of the full Food Safety Bill. We plan to introduce the Amendment Bill into the Legislative Council (LegCo) in November 2008.

Progress Report on Implementation of On-going Initiatives

- (a) *Introduce a Food Safety Bill to provide for new food safety control tools. The Bill will include a mandatory registration scheme for food importers and distributors, enhanced food traceability measures and tightened controls for imported food*

5. As explained above, we have planned to introduce a Food Safety Bill into LegCo in 2008-09. The Bill will introduce new food safety control measures, including a mandatory registration scheme for food importers and distributors, requirement for food traders to maintain proper records on the movement of food and enhanced import control for specified food type. We have completed the public consultation on the Food Safety Bill with the trade, the public and other stakeholders. We have also been discussing the proposal with the Consulates-General in Hong Kong. We will continue to liaise with the various stakeholders to ensure that the Bill will enhance food safety in Hong Kong and at the same time, take into account the current trade practices so as to minimize

the burden on the trade. We will brief the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (Panel) before introduction of the Bill into LegCo.

(b) Introduce legislation to provide for a set of comprehensive and clear food safety standards for pesticide residues and veterinary drug residues in food that meet Hong Kong's needs.

6. The proposed regulatory framework for pesticide residues in food in Hong Kong, together with the Consultation Document, was introduced to the Panel in November 2007. Public consultation had also been conducted between November 2007 and end January 2008.

7. The regulatory framework is being refined, taking into account the views received during the public consultation. We will introduce the legislation on the regulatory framework to LegCo once ready.

8. On the other hand, details of the proposal on regulatory control of veterinary drug residues in food in Hong Kong are being worked out, taking into account views on the formulation of the regulatory framework of pesticide residues in food.

(c) Continue the programme to convert all aqua privies into flushing toilets in phases by 2012-13.

9. Aqua privies are not desirable public toilet facilities. We have since 2005 been implementing a programme to convert aqua privies into flushing toilets by phases. The conversion of 97 aqua privies under phases 1, 2A and 2B was completed in end 2007. Conversion of another 50 aqua privies under phases 3 and 4 is expected to complete by May 2009.

10. In July 2008, the LegCo Finance Committee approved the upgrading of the project to convert another 80 aqua privies under phase 5 to Category A. The conversion work under phase 5 is expected to complete by May 2010. We will continue the conversion of the remaining 289 aqua privies into flushing toilets for completion in 2012-13.

(d) Tighten up the regulatory framework for poultry and animals for the purpose of enhancing public health and food safety.

11. The Government has all along adopted a comprehensive preventive and surveillance programme to reduce the risk of avian influenza outbreaks in Hong Kong. The measures included tight biosecurity measures and vaccination at local farms, enhanced import control, market rest days, stringent hygiene requirements on wholesale and retail markets, etc. Following the detection of avian influenza virus in retail markets in early June this year, the Government considered that there was imminent need to enhance the preventive measures at retail level so as to improve our ability to arrest future possible spread of avian influenza virus in Hong Kong and to better protect public health. As such, on 2 July 2008, we introduced the new measure of prohibition of overnight stocking of live poultry at retail level. This new measure helps break the virus cycle and reduce the virus load in the environment. It also makes it easier for the Administration to monitor whether there are smuggled chickens at the retail level. In response to the trade's request, the Administration has also concurrently introduced a buyout package to allow live poultry traders to choose whether to leave the trade for good. Given that around 70% of retailers have left the live poultry trade, the chance of close contact between live poultry and humans can be further reduced, which in turn reduces the risks posed by avian influenza virus.

(e) Develop a multi-pronged strategy to minimise the risk of avian influenza outbreaks, including the development of a poultry slaughterhouse.

12. As the long-term measure to reduce the risk of human infection of avian influenza, the Administration has previously been planning for the development of a relatively large scale poultry slaughtering and processing plant (PSPP) and banning the sale of live poultry at retail outlets when the PSPP comes into operation. Given the shrinkage of the live poultry trade resulted from the buyout scheme, a large scale PSPP is no longer needed and the poultry slaughtering facility under planning will be of a much reduced scale. We are pressing ahead with the preparatory work on environmental impact assessment, rezoning application, legislative amendments, etc. with a view to expediting the implementation of central poultry slaughtering as far as practicable.

(f) *Formulate measures to streamline food business licensing, including the introduction of a composite licence/permit scheme to facilitate the operation of food business which manufacture and sell various types of ready-to-eat food items.*

13. To facilitate the diversified operation of the food business, we briefed the Panel in January 2008 on the latest proposal of the introduction of a composite licence scheme for the manufacture / sale of various types of ready-to-eat food items. We are preparing the amendment regulation and will submit it to LegCo once ready.

14. Meanwhile, a number of improvement measures have been implemented to facilitate food business operation. Certain licensing requirements which do not pose food hygiene problems have been relaxed and the procedures of the food business licensing regime have been further streamlined. A new online tracking service for food business-related licence applications was launched in February 2008, enabling online tracking of the application status through the internet. Under the Government's "Be the Smart Regulator" Programme, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), in collaboration with the Efficiency Unit, Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, Liquor Licensing Board and relevant departments, is working on the development of an e-licensing system for Liquor Licences. We will explore the feasibility of other streamlining measures and will consult the trade and the Panel on these measures at appropriate junctures.

(g) *Review proposals on the regulation of restricted dining places to safeguard public health.*

15. After the proposal for the regulation of restricted dining places was put forward, we have been liaising with the trade to solicit their views. We have also been closely monitoring and taking enforcement actions against restricted dining places operating without a licence. Illegal operation has now been reduced significantly. Many operators have already been granted valid licences. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and review the need for introducing regulations to control restricted dining places based on actual circumstances.

(h) Formulate measures to promote sustainable development of the fishing industry and to conserve fisheries resources in Hong Kong waters.

16. The Committee on Sustainable Fisheries was formed in late 2006 to study the long-term policy for fisheries development that can maintain a viable balance between conservation of fisheries resources and development of the industry.

17. The Committee has carefully considered in detail the issues pertaining to the difficulties faced by the local fisheries industry, and has drawn up some preliminary proposals to promote the sustainable development of the fisheries industry. The aims of the preliminary proposals are to promote modernization and development of sustainable fisheries, control on fishing effort, as well as conservation and enhancement of local fisheries resources.

18. The Committee is now consulting relevant stakeholders, including fishermen groups, green groups and committees relating to fisheries in Hong Kong, on these preliminary proposals. It is expected that the Committee's report will be submitted to the Government for consideration by the end of 2008.

(i) Introduce legislation to control the abstraction of seawater from the coastal waters for keeping live seafood to enhance food safety.

19. Consultation forums have been held between with seafood/food trade and district councils. Attendees were generally supportive of the proposed regulatory measures. We are refining the amendment regulation and plan to submit the relevant legislation to LegCo in 2008-09.

(j) Explore how to co-operate with the Mainland authorities on using latest information technology application to ensure effective tracing of food along the production chain and achieve better food safety management through control at source.

20. The inter-departmental working group, represented by FHB, FEHD, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Customs and Excise Department and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer, and the Mainland authorities have organised trial runs on the application of radio frequency identification for imported live pigs. The latest round of trial, involving live pigs imported from Guangdong, has commenced in late July 2008. The trial will last for six months.

(k) Review the policies related to the provision of cemeteries, columbaria and crematoria facilities and strive to provide more facilities to meet future demand.

21. The Administration continues its work on providing more public columbarium and crematorium facilities. Projects under planning include the reprovisioning of the Wo Hop Shek Crematorium and the Cape Collinson Crematorium by phases. Upon the completion of all phases of these two projects, earliest by around 2014, the total annual capacity of all public cremators could be increased from 37 000 sessions to 54 000 sessions. The construction of 3 200 niches in the Kwai Chung Columbarium and another 18 500 in the Diamond Hill Columbarium are due for completion by early 2009. New columbarium facilities providing for some 30 000 niches and a Garden of Remembrance at the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery for completion by around 2012 are also being planned.

22. The support of the LegCo, local residents and relevant district councils remains essential to the provision of public columbarium and crematorium facilities as well as the implementation of other Government burial service plans. With the support of the Panel and relevant district councils, the option of scattering cremated human ashes at sea has been gaining momentum and 286 applications have been received and processed thus far. The new Garden of Remembrance at Cape Collinson, which commenced operation in December 2007, has handled 191 applications.

**Food and Health Bureau
October 2008**