

立法會
Legislative Council

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Paper for the House Committee meeting on 4 June 2010

**Proposed overseas duty visit to Japan by
the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

Purpose

This paper seeks the permission of the House Committee for the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") to conduct an overseas duty visit in early September 2010 to study columbarium facilities and fisheries industry in Japan.

Background

Columbarium facilities

2. With a growing and aging population in Hong Kong, the number of deaths and the corresponding number of cremations have been rising gradually year on year. According to the Administration, the annual number of deaths is projected to increase from 43 700 in 2010 to 52 800 in 2020. The annual number of cremations will also rise from 39 200 in 2010 to 49 600 in 2020 correspondingly. With an increasing demand for cremation service, there is an increasing need for the supply of niches.

3. At present, in addition to the columbarium facilities run by non-government organisations (e.g. the Board of Management of Chinese Permanent Cemeteries), religious entities and the private sector, there are eight public columbaria managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department providing a total of some 167 900 public niches. About 41 000 public niches will also be provided at the new columbarium at Kiu Tau Road within the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery by the end of 2011 or early 2012.

4. To address the growing need for niches, it is necessary for the Administration to, amongst others, identify suitable locations for the development of columbarium facilities in different areas in Hong Kong (including urban area), such as by the

construction of or conversion into multi-storey columbarium blocks. These buildings only occupy a small land area, and relieve people from travelling to remote places for paying tribute to their ancestors. The Panel notes that there have been successful experiences of overseas countries, such as Japan, in using high-rise buildings as columbarium blocks.

Sustainable development of the local fisheries industry

5. The fisheries industry has a long history in Hong Kong and can be categorised as capture fisheries and aquaculture fisheries. In capture fisheries, there are currently about 3 700 fishing vessels in Hong Kong, of which about 1 100 are trawlers while the remaining are mostly sampans and small fishing boats engaged in inshore fishing. Hong Kong's fishing fleet had a production of about 159 000 tonnes valued at approximately \$2 billion in 2009, supplying about 30% of the local consumption of marine products. In aquaculture fisheries, there are about 1 000 holders of marine fish culture licence operating in 26 designated fish culture zones in Hong Kong. The production of marine fish culture in 2009 was about 1 400 tonnes, amounting to about \$92 million in value. As for pond fish culture, the total area of fish ponds covers an area of about 1 000 hectares and are located mainly located in Northeast New Territories. Pond fish culture produced about 2 100 tonnes in 2009 with a total value of approximately \$35 million.

6. About 10 000 fishermen in Hong Kong are directly engaged in capture and aquaculture fisheries, while about 8 000 Mainland deckhands are employed to assist in operation in fishing vessels or fish farms.

7. As compared to the last century, the fisheries resources within the traditional fishing grounds of Hong Kong's fishing fleet, namely local waters and the South China Sea, have been beset with problems of excessive fishing effort, marine pollution and marine works, leading to a significant reduction in the quality and quantify of fish catch. Taking into account the rise in operating costs, the fishermen's business has become increasingly difficult, as is the case of capture fisheries around the globe. The Committee on Sustainable Fisheries established by the Government in 2006 to study the long-term direction and goals for the development of the territory's fisheries industry, as well as feasible strategies and options to promote its sustainable development, submitted its report to the Government for consideration in April 2010. The report recommended a number of proposals to take forward the following two major directions for promoting the sustainable development of fisheries -

- (a) to assist fishermen to develop or switch to modernised and sustainable practices; and
- (b) to protect, conserve and rehabilitate the marine ecosystem and fisheries resources.

8. To enable members to grasp the latest development on provision of columbarium facilities and promotion of sustainable fisheries and facilitate their deliberations on the issues concerned, the Panel found it worthwhile to make reference to overseas experience. The Panel had asked the Research and Library Services Division ("RLSD") of the Legislative Council Secretariat to gather information on the columbarium facilities in Tokyo and the fisheries industry in Hokkaido.

9. Having regard to the research findings of RLSD, members consider it useful to visit Japan in early September 2010 to obtain first hand information on the operation and development of the country's columbarium facilities and ways to sustain its fisheries industry. While in Japan, visits will also be made to the relevant authorities to learn about the country's food traceability mechanism to safeguard food safety.

Details of the proposed visit

10. The Panel is seeking the assistance of the Consulate General of Japan in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Tokyo in drawing up the visit programme.

Membership of delegation

11. The Panel has agreed that the proposed visit will be open to non-Panel members. A list of Members (including five Panel members and one non-Panel member) who have indicated interest in participating in the visit is in the **Appendix**. As the Panel on Health Services has also proposed to conduct a duty visit to Japan at about the same time, some members have also indicated interest in joining the study on the financing models for healthcare services.

Funding arrangements

12. As approved by The Legislative Council Commission, each Member is provided with an overseas duty visit account of \$55,000 for the purpose of duty visits outside Hong Kong organised by committees of the Council. The fund in the account is for use by the Member in a four-year term. Any expenditure incurred in excess of the available balance in a four-year term has to be paid by the Member personally.

13. A preliminary estimate of the expenditure (including airfare, hotel accommodation, meals, in-town travelling and miscellaneous expenses etc.) to be incurred by each participating Member for the proposed duty visit lasting about seven days is about HK\$28,999 (for economy class air passage) or HK\$44,059 (for business class air passage).

Advice sought

14. Rule 22(v) of the House Rules ("HR") provides that should any Panel consider it necessary to undertake any activities outside Hong Kong under the name of the Panel of the Council, the prior permission of the House Committee shall be sought. According to HR 26(f), this Rule applies, where appropriate, to subcommittees of House Committee, Bills Committees and Panels.

15. The House Committee's permission is sought for the Panel to conduct the overseas duty visit as proposed.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
2 June 2010

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**List of members who have indicated interest in taking part in
the visit to Japan in early September 2010**

(Position as at 1 June 2010)

Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, SBS, JP (Chairman)

Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)

Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP

Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau

Non-Panel Member

Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP

(Total : 6 members)