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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Meeting on 11 May 2010

**Proposal to undertake an overseas duty visit to study
columbarium facilities and fisheries industry in Japan**

Purpose

Members' views are invited on a preliminary proposal for the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") to conduct an overseas duty visit to study columbarium facilities and fisheries industry in Japan.

The proposed visit

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 steadily 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 a total of 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. Hong Kong is a small territory with a huge population, and the majority of those in the community resist the development of new columbaria in their own districts. To address the growing need for niches, the Administration will need to, amongst others, identify suitable locations for the development of

columbarium facilities in different areas in Hong Kong (including urban area), such as by 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. 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. In 2009, Hong Kong's fishing fleet had a production of about 159 000 tonnes valued at approximately \$2 billion, supplying about 30% of the local consumption of marine products. In aquaculture fisheries, there are currently a total of 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 Northwestern 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 quantity 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. In view of this, the Government established the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries in late 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. Chaired by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation, the Committee comprised Legislative Council Members, representatives from the fisheries industry, academics and experts from various fields and representatives from relevant Government departments. The Committee has submitted its report to the Government for consideration in May 2010, in which a number of proposals have been recommended 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.

Proposed scope and objectives of the visit

8. The Panel Chairman and the Deputy Panel Chairman have suggested that the Panel conducts an overseas visit to gain a better insight into the feasible alternatives to increase the supply of columbarium facilities and the development of sustainable fisheries in Japan. In respect of the former, the duty visit will focus on the development of privately-operated multi-storey columbarium to meet growing demand for niches, which is one of the alternatives being considered by the Administration in converting unused industrial buildings into multi-storey columbarium blocks. In respect of the latter, focus will be made on the policies and management measures adopted by the Hokkaido government in revitalising its dwindling fisheries industry.

9. Two information notes on the columbarium facilities in Tokyo and the fisheries industry in Hokkaido prepared by the Research and Library Services Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat are in **Appendices I and II**.

Proposed timing of the visit

10. It is proposed that the visit be conducted in early September 2010.

Composition

11. The broad guidelines are that members of the Panel should have priority in participating in the visit. Non-Panel members may join a duty visit outside Hong Kong with the consent of the Panel.

Funding

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 Members 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.

The way forward

13. Members are invited to advise on paragraphs 8 to 11 above. Subject to members' views, the Secretariat will work out the details of the proposed duty visit for members' further consideration.

FACT SHEET

Columbarium facilities in Tokyo

1. Background

1.1 The Government is considering feasible alternatives to increase the supply of public columbarium niches to deal with the shortage of burial plots in Hong Kong¹. One of these alternatives is to convert unused industrial buildings into multi-storey columbarium blocks. Given that there are successful experiences of some cities in Japan in using high-rise buildings as columbaria, the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene has requested the Research and Library Services Division to look into the development of columbarium facilities in Tokyo, which is one of the most densely populated cities in the world having similar problem with burial land shortage. General information about Tokyo and relevant details on its columbarium facilities are provided in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1 – General overview of Tokyo

Land area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tokyo, officially named Tokyo Metropolis, is the capital city of Japan. In terms of land area, Tokyo is the third smallest prefecture among Japan's 47 prefectures (administrative divisions), occupying a total area of 2 187 sq km.
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of population, Tokyo is the largest city in Japan. As at February 2010, Tokyo's population was estimated to be 12 989 726, which were defined according to three age categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) juveniles (below 15): 1.48 million (11%); (b) working age population (15 to 64): 8.54 million (65%); and (c) aged population (65 or above): 2.49 million (19%). • In 2009, there were 6.21 million households in Tokyo, with 2.1 persons per household on average. • In 2008, the number of deaths in Tokyo was 97 641. Cremation rate was almost 100% (in Japan overall). • In 2005, the average life expectancy for men and women living in Tokyo was 79 and 85.5 years respectively.

¹ In Hong Kong, the waiting time for a reused niche in a public columbarium to hold the ashes of the deceased may take seven to 56 months. See 香港電台網上廣播站 (2009年).

Table 1 – General overview of Tokyo (cont'd)

Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The major religions in Tokyo are Buddhism and Shintoism.
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2008, Tokyo was ranked the world's largest metropolitan economy, with an estimated gross domestic product at purchasing power parity of US\$1,479 billion (HK\$11,487 billion).⁽¹⁾ According to the Worldwide Cost of Living survey conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2009, Tokyo topped the list of the world's most expensive cities to live in. As at December 2009, the monthly household income in Tokyo was ¥1,035,661 (HK\$89,170) on average.⁽²⁾

Notes: (1) The exchange rate in February 2010 was US\$1 = HK\$7.767.

(2) The exchange rate in February 2010 was ¥1 = HK\$0.0861.

Table 2 – Issues relating to columbarium facilities in Tokyo

Regulatory framework	
Major regulatory and administering authorities	(a) Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; (b) Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism; and (c) municipal governments.
Major legislation	(a) <i>City Planning Act</i> (1968), which ensures that the establishment or demolition of graveyards, crematoria and columbaria is in accordance with the city development plan; (b) <i>Land Readjustment Act</i> (1954), which ensures that the establishment or demolition of graveyards, crematoria and columbaria is in accordance with the land readjustment projects implemented in metropolitan regions; (c) <i>Law concerning Graveyards and Burial</i> (1948), which governs the management of graveyards, crematoria and columbaria, as well as issues concerning interment; and (d) <i>Law concerning the Prevention of Infectious Diseases and Medical Care for Patients of Infections</i> (1998), which provides exemptions from the prohibition of cremation or burial of people dying from pandemic diseases within 24 hours of death, as stipulated in the <i>Law concerning Graveyards and Burial</i> .

Table 2 – Issues relating to columbarium facilities in Tokyo (cont'd)

Operation of burial facilities in Tokyo	
Brief facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to Article 10 of the <i>Law concerning Graveyards and Burial</i>, any person who wants to operate a columbarium, graveyard or crematorium must obtain permission from the prefectural governor. • The columbaria in Tokyo are usually attached to or part of a Buddhist temple.
Number of columbaria, crematoria and graveyards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2006, there were 316 columbaria, 27 crematoria and 9 725 graveyards in Tokyo: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the 316 columbaria were operated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) religious corporations (宗教法人): 298; (ii) local public entities (地方公共團體): 10; and (iii) legal persons (民法法人) and others: four each; and (b) the 27 crematoria were operated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) local public entities: 19; and (ii) legal persons and others: four each; and (c) the 9 725 graveyards were operated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) individuals (個人): 6 876; (ii) religious corporations: 2 809; (iii) local public entities: 38; and (iv) legal person and others: one each.

Table 2 – Issues relating to columbarium facilities in Tokyo (cont'd)

Other relevant issues	
Columbaria and natural burial	<p><u>Multi-storey columbaria</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Tokyo, multi-storey columbaria may be built within Buddhist temples or housed in high-rise buildings (including conversion from reused warehouse space). Information on the number of multi-storey columbaria in Tokyo is not available. • A few multi-storey columbaria in Tokyo make use of mechanized facilities to reduce the storage space per urn. Instead of adhering to the conventional practice of displaying all columbarium niches permanently, ashes of the deceased in such kind of columbaria are kept in urns on shelves in a vault. Visitors use smart cards and computer facilities (e.g. a touch screen) to activate a robotic arm to retrieve the correct urn and place it in one of the several viewing areas for remembrance ceremonies. The viewing area may come with a computer screen showing images of the deceased person and other decorations, such as a floral background. • The multi-storey columbaria are primarily managed by religious corporations or private companies. Some examples of multi-storey columbaria operated in Tokyo are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Tokyogobyō (東京御廟): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a four-storey mechanized columbarium operated by a religious corporation; (ii) opening hours daily from 10 am to 7 pm; and (iii) an urn space for an individual costing ¥380,000 (HK\$32,718), with an annual management fee of ¥8,000 (HK\$689); (b) Temple of Higashi-Honganji, Asakusa (東本願寺慈光殿浅草浄苑): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) a five-storey hall built in 2009 as part of a Buddhist temple; (ii) mechanized columbarium facilities provided on the third and fourth floors of the hall, which can store around 3 000 urns; and (iii) an urn space for an individual costing ¥980,000 (HK\$84,378), with an annual management fee of ¥12,000 (HK\$1,033);

Table 2 – Issues relating to columbarium facilities in Tokyo (cont'd)

Other relevant issues (cont'd)	
Columbaria and natural burial (cont'd)	<p><u>Multi-storey columbaria (cont'd)</u></p> <p>(c) 興安寺本郷陵苑⁽³⁾:</p> <p>(i) mechanized columbarium facilities provided in a recently completed five-storey extension to the main building. Around 4 600 urns can be held in this new extension. The basement of the six-storey main building is an indoor graveyard; and</p> <p>(ii) burial services managed by a religious corporation. An urn space for an individual costs ¥800,000 (HK\$68,880), with an annual management fee of ¥15,000 (HK\$1,292); and</p> <p>(d) 浅草正法寺墓苑⁽⁴⁾:</p> <p>(i) a nine-storey indoor graveyard operated by a private company. It is the largest indoor graveyard in Tokyo; and</p> <p>(ii) a burial place for an individual costing around ¥500,000 (HK\$43,050).</p> <p><u>Natural burials</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural burials in Japan mainly consist of scattering ashes at sea or in the mountains. • In Japan, there is no law prohibiting the scattering of human ashes. While the <i>Law concerning Graveyards and Burial</i> (Article 4) states that remains of the deceased must be buried in a cemetery, such prohibition applies only to conventional burials.⁽⁵⁾ • Natural burial has been gaining popularity in Japan since the establishment of the Grave-Free Promotion Society (GFPS) in 1991, a civic group for promoting the scattering of human ashes in Japan. Natural burial services are offered by GFPS and a number of companies, such as the JASDAQ-listed Sun Life Group. Commercialized sea scattering services were first offered by the Tokyo-based funeral company, Koueisha (公営社), established in 1994.⁽⁶⁾

Notes: (3) Name of the columbarium available in Japanese only.

(4) Name of the columbarium available in Japanese only.

(5) Japanese Economy Division (2006).

(6) Rowe (2003).

Table 2 – Issues relating to columbarium facilities in Tokyo (cont'd)

Other relevant issues (cont'd)	
Columbaria and natural burial (cont'd)	<p><u>Natural burials (cont'd)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of charges of natural burials are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) sea or mountain scattering offered by GFPS: ¥100,000 to ¥180,000 (HK\$8,610 to HK\$15,498), plus a documentation fee of ¥2,000 (HK\$172); and (b) sea scattering offered by Koueisha: ¥283,500 (HK\$24,409) for individual services or ¥105,000 (HK\$9,041) per person for group ceremonies.
Related information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In a survey conducted in 2009, 41% of Tokyo residents responded that they did not own a burial plot, and 61% of them would like to have one. • In central Tokyo, it costs around ¥10 million (HK\$861,000) to purchase a three-square-meter cemetery plot in perpetuity, while graves of a similar size are available at about one-tenth of the price in remote areas of Tokyo.

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FACT SHEET

Fishery industry in Hokkaido

1. Introduction

1.1 The Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, at its meeting on 9 March 2010, requested the Research and Library Services Division to provide information on the fishery industry in Hokkaido. This fact sheet gives a general overview of the topic.

2. Overview of the fishery industry in Japan

2.1 In Japan, the fishery industry contributed to less than 1% of the Gross Domestic Product in 2007¹. The primary role of the fishery industry is to provide a stable supply of fishery products for domestic consumption. Domestic production supported 62% of Japan's national consumption of fishery products in 2007².

2.2 Fishery production in Japan has dwindled since the late 1980s due to a decline in resources level of the Japanese fishing grounds and Japan's withdrawal from the fishing grounds of neighbouring countries' 200-mile fishing zones³. The total amount of fishery production was 5.72 million tons in 2007, comparing to 7.49 million tons in 1995⁴. The total value of fishery production was ¥1,654 billion (HK\$109.8 billion) in 2007, with marine fisheries and marine aquaculture production accounting for 95% of the production value⁵.

¹ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2010).

² Statistics Bureau, Japan (2009).

³ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2009).

⁴ Statistics Bureau, Japan (2009).

⁵ 農林水産省，大臣官房統計部(2009年)。

3. Overview of the fishery industry in Hokkaido

3.1 Hokkaido, having a land area of 83 457 sq km, is the largest prefecture of Japan. As at October 2008, Hokkaido had a population of 5.54 million, accounting for about 4% of the total population of Japan⁶. Hokkaido is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan with a coastline of 3 054 km, which is 9% of the country's coastline⁷.

3.2 In 2007, there were 15 480 fishery establishments in Hokkaido, down from 23 222 in 1988. The fishery industry engaged 26 590 employees in 2007, and most of them were males (86%) and aged 40 or above (78%). Statistics on the structure of the fishery industry in Hokkaido in 2007 are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Statistics on the structure of the fishery industry in Hokkaido in 2007

	Hokkaido	Percentage of Japanese total
Number of fishing ports	285	9.8%
Number of fishery establishments ⁽¹⁾	15 480 ⁽²⁾	12.7%
Number of persons engaged in the fishery industry	26 590	13.0%
Number of powered fishing boats for marine fisheries	30 750	10.4%

Notes: (1) Figures are as at 2006.

(2) 88% were small establishments managed by individual fishermen, 9% were jointly managed by groups of fishermen, and 3% were managed by companies, fishery co-operatives or the government.

Sources: 北海道政府 (2009 年) and Statistics Bureau, Japan (2010).

⁶ Statistics Bureau, Japan (2009).

⁷ 北海道政府 (2009 年)。

3.3 In line with the overall trend in Japan, the fishery production of Hokkaido has declined since the late 1980s⁸. In 2007, the fishery production of Hokkaido was 1.474 million tons, contributing to around 26% of the Japanese total. The total value of fishery production, accounting for only marine fisheries and marine aquaculture production, was ¥311.4 billion (HK\$20.68 billion), accounting for about 19.8% of the Japanese total⁹. Statistics on the fishery production of Hokkaido by types of fishery activities in 2007 are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2 – Statistics on the fishery production of Hokkaido in 2007

	Production volume (‘000 tons)	Production value (¥ billion (HK\$ billion))
Marine fisheries	1 307	269.8 (17.92)
Marine aquaculture	156	41.6 (2.76)
Inland water fisheries and inland aquaculture	11	Not available
Total	1 474	311.4 (20.68)⁽¹⁾

Note: (1) Figure accounts for production of marine fisheries and marine aquaculture only.

Source: 北海道政府(2009年)。

3.4 The top three types of fishery products in terms of total production volume in 2007 were: scallop (27% of total production volume), Alaska pollack (14.2%) and salmon (12%). The top three types of fishery products in terms of production value were: salmon (21.9% of total production value), scallop (21.7%) and seaweed (8.9%)¹⁰. Scallop was the main marine aquaculture product, accounting for 80% of the production volume¹¹.

3.5 In 2007, 1 097 business establishments engaged in the processing of fishery products in Hokkaido, employing 33 440 persons. The total production of processed fishery products in 2007 was 0.8 million tons, contributing to 20.8% of the Japanese total. The total value of shipments was ¥707.2 billion (HK\$46.96 billion), accounting for 20.8% of the Japanese total¹².

⁸ In 1988, the fishery production of Hokkaido was 3.135 million tons.

⁹ 北海道政府(2009年)。

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 農林水産省，大臣官房統計部(2008年)。

¹² 北海道政府(2009年)。

3.6 As at March 2008, there were 1 730 registered establishments in the recreational fishing business in Hokkaido, operating 1 906 fishing boats¹³. The government imposes control on the fishing areas, timing, tools and methods of recreational fishing to protect the fishery resources of Hokkaido.

4. Policy on promoting the fishery industry in Hokkaido

4.1 The recent development of the fishery industry in Hokkaido has been affected by a number of factors such as the declining level of fishery resources, decreasing domestic demand on fishery products, rising fuel costs, decreasing number and aging of fishery workers, competition from imported products and falling product prices¹⁴.

4.2 In order to revive the fishery industry in Hokkaido, the Hokkaido government enacted the *Hokkaido Fishery Industry Promotion Act* in March 2002 and introduced the Fishery Industry Development Plan in March 2003¹⁵. Under the administration of the Department of Fisheries and Forestry, the Development Plan aimed to revitalize the fishery industry and provide stable domestic supply of safe and quality fishery products. As specified in the Development Plan, the Hokkaido government has targeted to increase the annual fishery production from 1.474 million tons in 2007 to 1.72 million tons in 2017¹⁶.

4.3 The following key development directions were set in the Fishery Industry Development Plan:

- (a) promoting proper management and use of fishery resources;
- (b) promoting aquaculture production by developing new technology, improving production efficiency, and strengthening facilities of the fisheries;
- (c) improving the management of fishery establishments and enhancing their capital equipment to increase productivity;

¹³ 北海道政府(2009年)。

¹⁴ Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2009) and 北海道水産林務部(2008年)。

¹⁵ The first phase of the Development Plan was introduced in March 2003 and the second phase was introduced in March 2008.

¹⁶ 北海道水産林務部(2008年)。

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- (d) strengthening the distribution and food safety monitoring systems to ensure freshness and quality of fishery products;
 - (e) enhancing competitiveness of Hokkaido fishery products in the domestic and overseas markets;
 - (f) promoting preservation of the ecosystem when developing the fishery industry;
 - (g) improving the environment and infrastructure of the fishing villages;
 - (h) promoting technological development in the industry;
 - (i) providing support to female and older workers in the industry and attracting young prospective workers to join the industry; and
 - (j) educating the public about the fishery industry and stimulating their interest in fishery products.

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