

**Speaking Note for the Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 25 March 2011**

Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
--

Madam Chairman and Honourable 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.

2. In the 2011-12 Estimates, about \$5.1 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene", representing an increase of \$295 million over the previous year.

3. I will now proceed to outline the policy priorities and work progress.

Food Safety

4. To strengthen food safety control for protection of public health, the Government submitted the Food Safety Bill (the Bill) to the Legislative Council in June last year. The Bill has introduced the food traceability mechanism to ensure that the Government can trace the source of the problem food more effectively and take prompt action when dealing with food incidents. I would like to thank Members for their input and support. The Bills Committee has completed scrutiny of the Bill. We will resume the Second Reading debate of the Bill on 30 March.

5. The Centre for Food Safety will continue to adopt the strategy of "from farm to table" in conducting food surveillance on the food supply chain from source to downstream stages. This will be complemented by the passage of the Bill which will further safeguard food safety. As a matter of fact, the overall

satisfaction rate of the tests under the Food Surveillance Programme of the Centre for Food Safety was 99.7% in 2010, reflecting that food safety in Hong Kong is maintained at a high level.

Review of Columbarium Policy

6. On increasing the supply of columbarium facilities, the feedback obtained during the earlier public consultation shows that the community is generally supportive of the district-based columbarium development scheme. So far, we have identified a total of 17 potential sites in 12 districts for building public columbarium facilities, and the study on the feasibility of developing these sites is underway. Meanwhile, we are continuing to look for suitable sites in the remaining six districts, with a view to making an announcement in the coming months.

7. To enhance consumer protection, the Development Bureau published information on private columbaria known to the Government in late 2010. The Administration has also taken steps to strengthen consumer education through production of announcements of public interest to remind members of the public to obtain detailed information from the operators of private columbaria when purchasing niches at these columbaria, and to seek independent legal advice where necessary. The public may also opt to scatter the cremains of their ancestors in Gardens of Remembrance or in designated waters.

8. The public in general supported a licensing scheme to enhance regulation of private columbaria, but expressed divergent views over the scope and level of regulation under the licensing scheme and the arrangements for pre-existing private columbaria. The Government must exercise prudence in handling the matter. We plan to report back to the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) at its meeting next month on the outcome of the consultation on review of columbarium policy, relevant work progress and the proposed way forward.

Taking Forward the Trawl Ban

9. Regarding the legislative proposals to take forward the trawl ban in Hong Kong waters and other fisheries management measures, we briefed Members of the Panel on the relevant work progress and proposed way forward

at its meeting on 8 March 2011. We also listened to views from relevant organisations at a special Panel meeting held on 15 March. The subsidiary legislation relating to implementation of the trawl ban will soon be introduced into the LegCo for scrutiny.

10. To assist the affected fishermen, the Government will offer ex-gratia allowance payments to the trawler owners affected by the trawl ban to be effected through legislation; buy out the affected trawler vessels of those trawler owners who volunteer to surrender their vessels; and provide one-off grants to assist the affected local deckhands employed by the trawler owners who volunteer to surrender their trawler vessels. Prior to seeking funding approval from the Finance Committee, we will present the finalised proposals with detailed arrangements including financial implications to the Panel. The trawl ban initiative will take effect in late 2012 the earliest.

11. Besides, we propose to set up a registration system for local fishing vessels, maintain an appropriate level of fishing effort, and designate fisheries protection areas to protect important fish spawning and nursery grounds. We plan to table the Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill in the LegCo in the second quarter of 2011.

Pesticide Residues in Food

12. The Government has always been concerned about possible effect of pesticide residues in food to public health. In this connection, the Government pledged to introduce new legislation to regulate pesticide residues in food in Hong Kong, so as to better protect public health, facilitate effective regulatory control and promote harmonisation between local and international standards. The Centre for Food Safety is conducting technical meetings with the trade on the proposed regulatory regime. We plan to consult the Panel as well as the public in July, and to introduce the relevant legislation into the LegCo at the end of this year.

Animal Welfare

13. As regards the protection of animal welfare, the Government has been accommodating as far as possible both the calls by the community for animal care and the public concern over the nuisance caused by stray animals.

Through publicity and education, we have disseminated the message that keeping a pet is a life long responsibility. We will allocate additional resources to actively publicise the animal re-homing scheme and to provide free neutering service for stray cats and dogs which have been adopted. We will also strengthen control over the sale of animals, including combating illegal animal trading activities on the Internet as well as closely monitoring the licensed animal traders to ensure that their operation complies with licensing conditions.

14. In the second quarter of 2011, we will bring up the subject for discussion at the Panel and update the Panel on the progress of the “trap-neuter-return” trial programme at the same time.

15. Madam Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to answer questions from Members.