

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1197/10-11(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 8 March 2011**

Ban trawling in Hong Kong waters

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on ban trawling in Hong Kong waters.

Background

2. The fisheries resources within Hong Kong waters have been beset with problems of marine pollution and capture fisheries, leading to a significant reduction in the quality and quantity of fish catch. In view of this, a Committee on Sustainable Fisheries ("the Committee") was set up by the Administration in December 2006 to study the long term goals and directions as well as feasible options and implementation strategy for the sustainable development of fisheries industry, with regard to fisheries trends, ecological sustainability, economic viability and other relevant factors, such as financial implications and social impact. The Committee, chaired by the Director of Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation, comprised of Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members, representatives from the fisheries industry, academics and experts from various fields and representatives from relevant Government departments.

3. The Committee submitted its report in April 2009 for the Administration's consideration. Since trawling is a non-selective fishing method that has great impact on the marine ecosystem, the Committee recommended, inter alia, a ban on trawling activities in Hong Kong waters through amending the existing

legislation. Recognizing that the livelihood of some trawler fishermen who operate mainly in Hong Kong waters would be adversely affected should the proposed trawl ban be implemented, the Committee suggested that the Administration could consider providing the affected fishermen with appropriate financial assistance, such as the introduction of a vessel buyout scheme. In this respect, the Committee advised that fishermen held different views on banning trawling in Hong Kong waters, but they considered the options and measures as set out in the report acceptable, provided that the price of trawler buyout scheme was fair, and the livelihood issue of the affected fishermen would be properly addressed.

4. The Administration consulted the Panel at the meeting on 11 May 2010, and relevant advisory bodies in mid-2010 on the findings and recommendations of the Committee, including the proposed trawl ban in Hong Kong waters. Briefing sessions for fishermen associations were also conducted by the Administration in mid-2010. Having regard to the views of the Panel and stakeholders on the recommendations of the Committee, the Chief Executive announced in the 2010-2011 Policy Address on 13 October 2010 that the Administration planned to ban fish trawling in Hong Kong waters through introducing legislation into LegCo in the 2010-2011 legislative session. To address the livelihood problems faced by the affected fishermen, the Administration would launch a voluntary trawler buyout scheme for eligible trawler fishermen. The scheme includes:

- (i) payment of an ex-gratia allowance to owners of the affected trawlers;
- (ii) introducing a voluntary buyout scheme to purchase the trawlers from the affected owners; and
- (iii) payment of a one-off grant to help local deckhands employed by owners of trawlers joining the buyout scheme.

5. The Administration would conduct further studies on other fisheries management measures, including capping the number of local fishing vessels, prohibiting non-local fishing vessels from operating in Hong Kong waters and designating fisheries protection areas in order to control the fishing effort of local capture fisheries and protect valuable marine resources. The Administration assured the Panel that the fisheries trade and LegCo Members would be consulted on details of the measures in due course. Subject to the legislative progress and funding approval from LegCo, the Administration planned to roll out the voluntary buyout scheme around late 2011 before the trawl ban takes effect in late 2012 at the earliest.

Deliberations of the Panel

6. The Panel Chairman and a member expressed grave concerns about the livelihood of trawler fishermen who would be directly affected by the proposal to ban trawlers from operation in local waters. The Chairman considered that the Administration should provide assistance to the affected fishermen by helping them to switch to other operations, such as recreational fisheries, or leave the industry through the introduction of a fishing vessel buyout scheme.

7. In this regard, a member pointed out that with the aim of promoting the sustainable development of the local fisheries industry, focus should be made on assisting the affected fishermen to develop or switch to modernized and sustainable practices instead of launching a fishing vessel buyout scheme to lure them to leave the industry. Another member shared the view that buying out vessels from fishermen was not the best way to promote sustainable development of the fisheries industry.

8. In response to the concerns and views of the Panel, the Administration stressed that the proposals of the Committee were being studied and evaluated in terms of their feasibility and implications for stakeholders and requisite resources. It was the Administration's intention to consult the Panel before taking forward any of the proposals which had funding implication and/or impact on stakeholders.

9. Following the Chief Executive's announcement in the 2010-2011 Policy Address on 13 October 2010, the Administration briefed the Panel at the meeting on 15 October 2010 on the policy initiatives relating to food safety and environmental hygiene, including the implementation of the Committee's proposal to ban trawling activities in local waters.

10. Regarding the Administration's suggestion to assist the fishermen affected by the proposed trawl ban to switch to recreational fishing, a member had reservations about its feasibility given the various restrictions imposed by the Marine Department on recreational fishing, and asked whether consideration could be given to assisting the affected fishermen to operate further afield in Nansha Islands. The Administration advised that there would be continuous discussion with the fishery trade to explore the arrangement to take forward the proposal, including assistance to the affected fishermen to prepare for ceasing their trawling activities in local waters and, if they so wished, switch to operations outside Hong Kong waters or sustainable fisheries operation including aquaculture and recreational fishing.

Views and concerns raised at Council meetings

11. During the motion debate on the 2010-2011 Policy Address on 28 October 2010, Hon WONG Yung-kan pointed out that the damages to the local marine ecosystem were caused by destructive marine operations, such as sand dredging, mud disposal and reclamation to the seabed. Rather than requesting fishermen to cease their operation by imposing a ban on trawling activities in local waters and buying out vessels from fishermen, Hon WONG Yung-kan urged the Administration to improve the water quality of Hong Kong and strive to preserve the local fisheries industry and extract of the speech by Hon WONG Yung-kan is in **Appendix 1**. Having regard to the adverse impact on marine capture brought by trawling activities, Hon Fred LI was in full support of the ban on this kind of fishing practice. Whilst urging the Administration to step up the implementation of the proposed trawl ban, Hon Fred LI expressed concern about the livelihood of fishermen who would be affected by this measure. Hon Fred LI also considered that fisheries conservation areas and moratorium zones should be set up in Hong Kong, and proposed the introduction of a registration system for local fishing vessels in order to combat illegal fishing by Mainland fishing vessels and extract of the speech by Hon Fred LI is in **Appendix 2**. The Administration's response to the aforesaid concerns and views of Members regarding the ban on trawling is in **Appendix 3**.

12. An oral question regarding the proposal of banning trawling in Hong Kong waters was also raised by Dr Hon Margaret NG at the Council meeting on 15 December 2010. Details of the question and the Administration's reply are in **Appendix 4**.

Relevant papers

14. Members are invited to access LegCo website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) for details of the relevant papers and minutes of the meetings of the Panel.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
2 March 2011

Why would the CCF go into the hands of Secretary TSANG Tak-sing, who would be responsible for allocating the money and resources? According to Chief Secretary Henry TANG, the CCF can take care of people who have been left out. But who are the people the Chief Secretary was talking about? Will Secretary Matthew CHEUNG have the clearest idea of these people? If Secretary Matthew CHEUNG is to take charge of the CCF, coupled with his own set of policies, adjustments can then be made if the policies are found to be inadequate. In so doing, the CCF can be put to even better use. I very much hope that the Government can reconsider which person should take charge of the CCF. Does it have to be Chief Secretary Henry TANG? Does it have to be Secretary TSANG Tak-sing? Of course, we will not necessarily support the establishment of the CCF, why? It is not because we loathe money. Instead, we are concerned about the reasons behind the establishment of the CCF. If the CCF is a one-off contribution, it would be tantamount to "dishing out money". If it means long-term resources, I believe the Government should conduct a proper review to examine which part of the safety net has a hole and repair it.

Thank you, Deputy President.

MR WONG YUNG-KAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, on behalf of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), I will now speak on the policies outlined in the Policy Address on the agriculture and fisheries industries, and food safety. Every year, the DAB will submit to the Chief Executive proposals on supporting the development of local agriculture and fisheries industries in the hope that the Government can accept and care about friends in the agriculture and fisheries sector. However, the proposals put forward in all policy addresses have not only failed to provide support, they have on the contrary made vigorous efforts to curb the sector's limited viability. Over the past several years, the Government has resorted to public health legislation to pressurize chicken farmers and pig farmers, by persuasion as well as cheating, into surrendering their licences, and as a result, the livestock industry has shrunk drastically. Recently, however, Secretary Dr York CHOW officially announced the suspension of central slaughtering of poultry, citing that the threat of avian flu had lessened significantly. When the announcement was made, some poultry farmers who had already surrendered their licences complained, "What is wrong? What sort of a world is this? This is a scam, a once-in-a-century scam." At present, many chicken farmers and pig farmers

deeply regret their decisions to surrender their licences. Faced with no income and no work, and the fact that the amount of compensation granted by the Government is diminishing as a result of meeting daily expenses, they are very worried. The Policy Address this year has finally targeted fishermen for negotiation. The Government has requested trawlers be banned in Hong Kong waters. Moreover, some so-called incentives will be used to coax fishermen into selling their vessels. Obviously, the Government is attempting to use its old trick to oppress the industry.

The remarks made by the Government have always been high sounding. According to the reference materials provided by the Government to the Legislative Council, and I quote, "A ban on trawling activities will bring the harmful depletion to an immediate halt and thus enable the marine ecosystems to be gradually rehabilitated to an ecologically sustainable level." The real culprit responsible for the shrinking marine resources today should be the Government which provided funds years ago to fishermen to replace their vessels to become trawling fishermen. This is why the Government has to make atonement for its sins today by proposing to buy out inshore fishing vessels. However, in the entire document, there are merely dozens of words discussing this issue. Despite discussions over the past two to three decades, the Government has never admitted the wanton damage done by marine operations, such as sand dredging, mud disposal, reclamation, and so on, to the seabed. I must point out the damage done to the seabed by the sand dredging and mud disposal operations carried out by the Government years ago. For instance, the marine ecology of Kwo Chau Kwan To has yet to recover. The seabed of many fishing grounds, where capture fishery was carried out in the past, remains completely dead.

Deputy President, I would like to point out here that some fishermen put this question to me the other day. They said that the water as deep as 1 m in Tolo Harbour and some parts of Hong Kong waters has become dead and smelly, and the death of the marine ecology was largely attributed to the fact that the sludge produced by the reclamation operations had resulted in an outward expansion of the anaerobic layer. In this connection, I joined some fishermen to go trawling in Tolo Harbour a couple of weeks ago. Soon after the trawling operation started, I found myself shivering all over, as it turned out that what we got was not fish. There were no fish, shrimps or crabs; what we got was only some dead weeds and red worms. The coastal waters were inhabited entirely by those worms. How far did it go? When I asked the fishermen the stretches of

sea where fish was not found, they replied that it stretched as far as to Qingzhou. I am talking about Qingzhou in the Mainland, not Green Island in Hong Kong. The anaerobic layer has already reached there. What can the fisheries industry do in the future? Because of this, I have proposed to Chairman CHAN Hak-kan to request the Government to conduct a study to examine these: What has happened to the ocean? Why are the fishermen suffering so terribly? This situation cannot be caused by trawlers. The Government has often expressed its wish to do something for fishermen. What has it actually done? I hope the Government can conduct a study, a marine study, seriously. Now the Government is going to ban trawlers. Who should be held responsible when no more fish is found in the future? Will it be the Government, the ocean or Heaven? The Government should do something; it should not just stand there and do nothing. I think that it is not right to simply watch and believe what the Government said is right.

Two weeks ago, a representative from a wildlife fund approached me and I told him about this. He said they were not aware of it. I said, "Buddy, you are responsible for marine ecology, and you have always wanted us to cease operation. How come you have no idea of what has happened to the ocean." I was so angry that I could not help criticize him, "I think you are doing this not to solve problems for Hong Kong. Actually, you want the Government to drive us out of operation expeditiously." This is unfair. I wonder if Secretary Edward YAU and the Government will consider doing something in the light of this situation.

Deputy President, we have persistently proposed that the Government must improve the water quality in Hong Kong, rather than requesting fishermen to fold their operation. I believe I have previously pointed out in this Council that a variety of studies on aquaculture can be conducted here in Hong Kong. During a visit with Mr Fred LI to Shandong this year, we were presented with a clear picture of the development of fishery in Shandong. Not only were fish, kombu, sea cucumber, abalone, and the like, found there, but sea urchin could also be found. People there tried everything and studied everything. Hong Kong is surrounded by the sea. Why does it choose not to do anything? I think the Government should really conduct a serious review and do something.

Recently, some oyster farmers in Lau Fau Shan approached me and invited me to visit them for snapper fishing, saying that a lot of snappers could be found

there. I have once explained that if a place has fish rafts, oyster breeding rafts and even shellfish, the water quality there will be changed and become cleaner. Moreover, the recovery of the marine ecology will be speeded up. However, these people have no idea of all this even though they always carry on their lips the pet phrase that we have to conserve the ocean and promote environmental protection, so how can they protect the environment?

Deputy President, I do not want fishermen to be held responsible for "damaging the ocean" forever because this is unfair. Deputy President, we often say that a bad experience is never forgotten. After the surrender of licences by pig farmers and chicken farmers, fishermen are very cautious and worried about the Government's proposal to buy their fishing vessels, because accepting the money means that they will have no means to make a living. Although it is pointed out in paragraph 122 that leisure fishing will be developed, the Government indicates that there is no plan or framework for the development of leisure fishing. Neither has the Government given any thought to how to go about it.

The Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council has recently paid a visit to Hokkaido, Japan, where leisure fishing is developed and opportunities are provided for people to experience the life of fishermen by direct engagement through observation of fishermen in fishing and what they do to keep the industry alive. To this end, fishermen bringing people to go fishing or admiring fish in the sea are requested not to do anything to convert their vessels so as to allow people to see everything in their original flavour. When we asked them the reasons for doing so, they replied that they did so to allow people to experience real fishing operations and the life of fishermen, rather than displaying things which have been redecorated or converted. I hope Secretary Dr York CHOW can discuss with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Marine Department how we can develop such business opportunities. The Secretary can change the substance a little bit or do exactly the same thing.

As a member of the fisheries industry in Hong Kong, I can see that the Government has frequently expressed its wish to buy out the fishing vessels of fishermen. I think that in order to keep more young fishermen and farmers in the industry, remedial measures were recently launched in Japan because the country is faced with a situation like ours. While we are prohibited from

capturing inshore fishery resources in Hong Kong, the inshore fishery resources in Japan can still be captured, though to a limited extent only. However, its ageing population has become a very serious problem. In order to address this problem, the local government allocates funds to provide training for the industry and invites some old fishermen to lead young men into the industry. Furthermore, the government provides resources for fishermen and teaches them ways of fishing, as well as enhancing their knowledge of aquaculture technology. As a result, in Hokkaido alone, an additional 1 500 young fishermen joined the industry last year. I believe the Hong Kong Government can consider following Japan's practice. When we asked the people there why such an arrangement was made, they replied that it was because of the growing sales of scallops in Hokkaido. As a result, the industry should be vigorously supported, so that it could find more room for development. The same goes for the agricultural industry. If young people engaging in the agricultural industry have no place to stay, the local government will even build houses for them and provide training, with a view to preserving the industry.

Similarly, today we are talking about rising food prices when chicken farmers and pig farmers were requested to surrender their licences years ago, I said that if nothing was produced in Hong Kong, our function of adjusting prices would be completely lost when prices were adjusted in the future. Now, there is nothing we can do about price increases in pigs and chickens, and no one can control the prices. As for other foods, we cannot even grow our own vegetables. As a result, there is no way for prices to be adjusted and regulated. In the past, the number of pigs and chickens produced locally accounted for more than 20% and 50% respectively of the total number of pigs and chickens supplied in Hong Kong, which was conducive to price adjustments. However, we have nothing at all now. Therefore, should the Government not formulate anew some policies on this? Does the closure of these industries mean that production cannot be resumed? I think that this should not be the case. Let me cite a simple example. If the Government wants to maintain the production of 1 million chickens, it can lay down regulations and make its own requirements, so that our farmers can at least make adjustments to see how the target can be met and upgrade their hygiene facilities to meet the Government's requirements.

Despite the rapid rise in the prices of pig on the Mainland, there is a weird phenomenon in Hong Kong. Secretary Dr York CHOW, what is the phenomenon I am talking about? The phenomenon has something to do with

Although a growing number of countries have switched to nuclear power generation, I think Hong Kong should continue to invest in renewable energy for electricity generation, while studying the feasibility of nuclear power generation or procuring nuclear electricity from overseas countries, and use Hong Kong, a market with a population of 7 million, to attract Mainland enterprises to invest in renewable energy for power generation for the supply of electricity to the territory.

Environmental protection should be sustainable. If attempts to address the air pollution problem brings about another form of unpredictable pollution, I believe we should, before finding the answer to the problem, make more efforts in studying renewable energy and publicize the use of equipment with high energy efficiency and promote energy conservation. This is the only long-term and steady approach to address the problem.

President, I so submit.

MR FRED LI (in Cantonese): President, my speech is divided into two parts. However, since Mr Paul CHAN has mentioned electricity in his speech, I would also talk about it. Then I would come to the policy areas under the charge of Secretary Dr York CHOW.

Talking about natural gas, coal and nuclear power, among these sources of energy, the prices of natural gas and coal are not stable. Natural gas is quite expensive and generally speaking, it would only get more and more expensive. It is fortunate that the Hongkong Electric has long since entered into an agreement and it can purchase natural gas at a cheaper price. But 20 years from now, if we were to purchase natural gas, the price would definitely be higher than the natural gas presently procured by the China Light and Power (CLP) from Ya Cheng. So we can see that if the natural gas used by the CLP is increased from the present some 30% to some 40%, this will surely produce pressure on the power tariff. With respect to nuclear power, I think that a number of problems must be solved. First, it is the disposal of waste, a concern to the green groups. On the other hand, with respect to the new facilities set up in Guangdong Province with investment from the nuclear power station, we are concerned about the stake of the CLP and the degree of its participation in management. The merit of nuclear power is that its price is stable, unlike coal, natural gas and

petroleum the prices of which will fluctuate according to the trends in the international market.

Also, now seeing that Secretary TSANG Tak-sing is in attendance, I would like to also talk about the increasing number of complaints received by me about light pollution in the venues managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Now the lampposts in the sports grounds are getting better and better in design, but they are also getting taller and taller, and brighter and brighter. This unfortunately affects those high-rise buildings in the vicinity. People living there say that their bedrooms are lit up by the lights and great inconvenience is caused. They consider it a nuisance when their homes are lit up by these lights during dinner time. This is because the light can shine into their homes directly. Secretary Edward YAU is also very concerned about this kind of pollution. However, he does not know that another government department is producing pollution of another kind. I am sure light pollution is a problem we have to deal with in the future. In this respect, I hope the two Directors of Bureaux can visit some venues managed by the LCSD and see for themselves the kind of nuisance caused by strong lights as a result of modernization of facilities to people living nearby.

Moreover, Secretary Edward YAU, recently I received an interesting complaint from some minibus operators. Actually, there is a footage on YouTube and I am not sure if you have seen it already. It is about a couple who had a quarrel. The reason is the husband has to work night shifts and his working hours spent in driving green minibuses have become longer because of the need to switch to driving the new Euro IV minibus that meets the latest emission standards set by the Government. But the minibus he used to drive was a Toyota and it used a converter or something — something I do not know — to burn the particulates emitted. But as traffic is heavy in Hong Kong and there are often traffic jams, so vehicles cannot run smoothly. If you drive 30 km or 40 km, you will often come across traffic jams and you need to brake and then drive many times. The result is that not all the particulates are burned in the combustion, and the vehicles may have to pull over, with the engine running in order to burn the particulates. It is only when these particulates are all burnt that one can drive the vehicle again. This is actually not desirable. But if you do not do so, the engine will be damaged and it will not be good to the vehicle either. This causes a number of problems. First, as we want to legislate to require

drivers to switch off their engines, but now they have to park the vehicle and keep the engine running to burn away the particulates. This sounds a contradiction. Second, each minibus on that route will have to stop for about 45 minutes to one hour a day, or even longer. This affects the deployment of minibuses on that route and drivers pointed out that their employers require them to work overtime to make up for the time lost in parking the vehicle and burning the particulates.

There is also another problem and that is, the employers say that they do not want to replace their vehicles. This will not do because they are using the old diesel vehicles and the Government requires that these be replaced. As old vehicles are written off, the owners will have to buy new minibuses. But the new minibuses have got this problem. The owners cannot change over to the old vehicles and return to the *status quo*. So they do not buy any new vehicles and they will only service the old ones. This is not good to the air quality. I do not know if Secretary Edward YAU knows about it. This is not the policy area in my brief, but I have received such complaints. I hope the Secretary can look into this seriously to see if they say it is those Toyota vehicles. However, all minibuses at present are the Toyota make. I am not sure if this structural problem is unique to that make of vehicles. I think I need to gain some more knowledge of it.

Coming back to the policy area which is under the charge of Secretary Dr York CHOW, in this year's Policy Address, only two paragraphs are devoted to food safety and environmental hygiene. Despite the small number of paragraphs, they are rather special. The first one is on the ban on trawling, and the other is on animal rights. These two topics are new and they have never been mentioned before. On these two topics, the Democratic Party has always been supportive and concerned about them. So I wish to talk about our views on these topics. On the ban on trawling, according to figures from the Government, as well as a report from the Committee on the Sustainable Development of Fisheries of which I am a member, I think a ban on trawling must be implemented in Hong Kong waters as soon as possible. And I am one of those people who insist that this should be done.

President, I do not know if you know what is meant by trawling. This is trawling on the seabed, or trawling the net on the seabed after the net is dropped into the sea. Everything is caught by trawling into the net. You can just

imagine, a lot of things would be trawled away. Fishes of all sizes, shrimps and what not, they would all be trawled away, including those which have not grown up. This is very bad to sustainable development. Since 10 to 20 years ago, catches in the Hong Kong waters have been dropping. Some species have become extinct. Now we cannot see lobsters and red garoupas. They are not found here anymore. All this is the result of overfishing. Besides, this kind of trawling on the seabed has a great impact on marine capture. So we support a ban. Certainly, we have to continue to discuss this problem. What will these fishermen do? Should they apply for CSSA? How much money the Government will pay them for surrendering their fishing licence? I hope that the Government can come up with a proposal as soon as possible for consultation with the committee. I am in full support of a policy to ban trawling.

In addition, fisheries conservation areas and moratorium zones should be set up in Hong Kong, for work on this is not done in a holistic manner currently. We often quote the findings of a survey done by the Fisheries Centre of the University of British Columbia. But that study was done 12 years ago, which is really a long time ago. If any updating is done, we will certainly find that the situation is much worse than 12 years ago. Some of the recommendations made 12 years ago are only beginning to be proposed today. We should not delay the imposition of a ban on trawling and if we do not want to see any delay, we have got to legislate for it. I do not know if legislation is needed, there may be a need for it. Or we can see what the situation is like and also take this opportunity to implement a registration system for local fishing vessels in order to crack down on illegal fishing by Mainland fishing boats in Hong Kong. We are in such a deplorable state and these people are coming to rob us. If a registration system is in place, I believe it would help the marine police or the Marine Department in taking enforcement action.

Another thing is animal rights. Actually, next week Mr CHAN Hak-kan will propose a very detailed motion on that. I know that six Members have proposed amendments, including me. My amendment is actually the result of audience given to the views from a number of animal groups. The Government has responded to some demands from animal groups in this Policy Address and it should be commended. With respect to work on this, I think that it is only a start, which is not enough. There is room for improvement. This is because, compared to many countries, the policies of the SAR Government on animal

~~With these remarks, President, I implore Members to support the Policy Address and the original motion. Thank you.~~

SECRETARY FOR FOOD AND HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, food safety and environmental hygiene are closely related to people's life and crucial to the development of a "Quality City and Quality Life". I will now give further explanations and responses to the four policies and measures relating to food safety and environmental hygiene set out in the Policy Address and Policy Agenda and mentioned by Members today, namely, the ban on trawling, the discussion on columbarium policy, the Food Safety Bill and animal welfare. Regarding the issue of healthcare reform mentioned by Members such as Mr CHAN Hak-kan, I will give a response in the fourth debate session.

Following the Chief Executive's announcement in the Policy Address of the Government's plan to introduce legislation to ban trawling in Hong Kong waters, we have briefed the relevant panel of the Legislative Council on the details of the proposal. A number of environmental groups have expressed support for the proposal and considered that it can protect and restore the valuable marine resources and ecological environment of Hong Kong. I wish to specifically point out here that the Government proposed banning trawling mainly from the perspective of conservation and promoting the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, and the proposed policy directions are decisive and forward-looking.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has already commenced consultation with various fishermen's organizations and explained the proposed arrangements to them. As Mr WONG Yung-kan said earlier, fishermen are greatly concerned about the possible impact of this measure on their livelihood. We appreciate this point. Hence we have proposed the one-off, voluntary trawler buyout scheme to provide eligible trawler owners and local deckhands an *ex gratia* allowance and a grant, so as to alleviate the impact of the relevant measure on them. We will also introduce other measures, such as the provision of training and low-interest loans, to help fishermen switch to other sustainable fishery operations, including aquaculture and leisure fishing.

In the next few months, we will consult the industry and the relevant stakeholders on banning trawling and other measures to promote the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, including capping the number of local fishing vessels, prohibiting non-local fishing vessels from operating in Hong Kong waters and designating fisheries protection zones. We plan to brief the relevant panel on the details of the proposal in the first quarter next year.

The public consultation on the review of columbarium policy which lasted for about three months has just been completed on 30 September. We are now analysing the views collected during the consultation period, and we expect to brief and give an account to the relevant panel on the way forward early next year.

Regarding the columbarium policy, we have to deal with it in two aspects. First, we have to solve the problem at root by increasing supply. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries (BMCP) and various religious organizations anticipate that over 100 000 newly-built niches will be provided in the next three years. Moreover, members of the community are generally supportive of our proposed principle that different districts should collectively share the responsibility of developing columbarium facilities. They also hope that the Government will improve the outlook and layout of the relevant facilities to enhance public acceptance of columbaria. Sometime ago, the Government has proposed the first batch of 12 potential sites in seven districts, and most of the District Councils (DCs) have given in-principle support to them. We are now conducting technical feasibility studies and traffic impact assessment for the relevant sites. Once a site is confirmed to be suitable for columbarium development, the relevant DC will be formally consulted again. The Government will also continue to actively identify other suitable sites for columbarium development across the territory, and we encourage leaders of local communities and the DCs to propose potential sites. The Government will maintain its efforts in soliciting support from the DCs and local communities through continuous communication.

Another broad direction is to enhance regulation of private columbaria. During the consultation, members the community have expressed different views on the implementation details with regard to the scope and level of regulation of the proposed licensing scheme. After considering the proposals put forth by the

structures found during the operations were referred to the relevant departments for follow-up actions.

The FEHD will continue to keep in view the hygiene condition in the vicinity of Ting On Street. Apart from daily street sweeping, weekly pest control and street washing operations, regular inspections will be made to check the hygiene condition of the food premises in the area and public places nearby to ensure that food business operators and workers comply with the licensing conditions and statutory requirements. At the same time, the FEHD will continue to enhance publicity to put across the environmental hygiene message by means of posters, banners and talks, and work closely with the relevant DC and departments to further improve the hygiene condition of the area.

Ban on Trawling

8. **DR MARGARET NG** (in Chinese): *President, earlier, a newspaper published an interview with a girl from a fishing family, pointing out that the girl's six-member family earns a living by fishing, and she has been involved in the fishing industry along with her family since she was small, and she plans to make fishing her lifelong career. The article also says that the girl's aspiration of leading a simple life may be dashed very soon because this year's Policy Address has announced a voluntary trawler buyout scheme and proposed to ban trawling in Hong Kong waters through legislation. Regarding the Government's proposal of banning trawling in Hong Kong waters through legislation, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *how the Government will implement the relevant policies or measures proposed in the Report of the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries (the Report) released in March 2010 for assisting the affected fishermen so that they can choose to remain in the fishing industry;*
- (b) *whether the Government will consider adopting a natural phasing out policy, that is, allowing the existing owners of fishing vessels to continue their operations until they voluntarily give up the operations or die; if it will not, of the reasons for that; and*

- (c) *given that, while one of the proposals in the Report is the Government to assist the affected fishermen in switching to the aquaculture industry, the Report has also indicated that the annual production of both marine fish culture and pond fish culture in Hong Kong has been dropping persistently and shrinking significantly for more than a decade, whether the Government has assessed if the affected fishermen can earn a living if they switch to the aquaculture industry; of the land and resources that the Government will reserve for assisting the affected fishermen in switching to the aquaculture industry?*

SECRETARY FOR FOOD AND HEALTH (in Chinese): President,

- (a) In this year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive proposed to ban trawling in Hong Kong waters to protect our precious marine resources and ecology. We intend to introduce a special training programme for the trawler fishermen who have to give up their operations as a result of the ban, with a view to equipping them with the skills and knowledge for switching to selective fishing methods to continue with their operations, or to other sustainable fisheries operations, including mariculture and recreational fishing. Fishermen who have such needs may also apply to the Fisheries Development Loan Fund for low interest loans to put their plans of switching to other fisheries operations into action.

Besides, we plan to seek funding approval from the Legislative Council for introducing a one-off buy-out scheme for eligible trawler fishermen, with a view to adequately addressing the impact of the measure on their livelihood. The scheme will include: (1) offering *ex gratia* allowance payments to trawler vessel owners affected by the afore-mentioned measure; (2) proposing to the affected trawler vessel owners to buy out their trawler vessels on a voluntary basis; and (3) providing one-off grants to assist the local deckhands employed by the trawler vessel owners who take part in the buy-out scheme.

We believe the above proposed measures will assist the affected fishermen to switch to other sustainable fisheries or related

operations. As to the local deckhands employed by the trawler vessel owners who take part in the buy-out scheme, they will be given one-off grants to help them meet their short-term needs during the period when they are looking for another job. They can also join the training programmes provided by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) or the Employees Retraining Board, in order to switch to other fisheries-related or non-fisheries-related trades.

- (b) While non-selective means of fisheries operations have resulted in a decline in fisheries resources, there is evidence that some over-exploited local species still survive in sufficient numbers for successful restoration. However, if we do not take decisive action now to prevent the continued depletion of our fisheries resources and the destruction of the marine ecosystems, the damage to our marine ecosystems will become irreversible. In addition, the trade may also continue to exploit the remaining meagre fisheries resources until their complete depletion, thus seriously damaging the marine ecosystems and the capture fisheries sector.

In view of the above factors, we consider that the ban on trawling in Hong Kong waters should be implemented as early as possible to halt the harmful depletion of marine resources, thereby enabling the marine ecosystems to be gradually rehabilitated to an ecologically sustainable level. The restoration of fisheries resources in Hong Kong waters will in turn improve the cost efficiency and the operating environment of the fisheries industry, thus enhancing the vibrancy of the trade and livelihood of the practitioners.

- (c) The Committee on Sustainable Fisheries considers that given the growing concern of Hong Kong people over food quality and safety, there is an increasing demand for quality fisheries products. If the trade can strengthen the management of the local aquaculture industry, improve the culture techniques, as well as raise the quality of fisheries products and the level of food safety, the competitiveness of local fisheries products will be enhanced, providing room for further development for the industry.

The AFCD is currently assisting fishermen who are interested in the aquaculture industry to acquire the techniques required and promoting the development of the aquaculture industry through the provision of training and technical support, including organizing aquaculture training courses in co-operation with Mainland universities and research institutions; inviting Mainland and overseas experts to provide technical support and training; arranging visits for local fishermen to the Mainland and overseas to study aquaculture techniques; developing fish fry hatching and breeding techniques and introducing new fish species, as well as introducing the "Fish Health Management Programme", the "Good Aquaculture Practices Programme" and the "Accredited Fish Farm Scheme".

Moreover, the AFCD has been following up with relevant bureaux/departments in reviewing the moratorium on the issue of new marine fish culture licences, and studying the expansion and rotation of fish culture zones to facilitate trawler fishermen to switch to mariculture.

Conservation of Wing Lee Street

9. **MR IP KWOK-HIM** (in Chinese): *President, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) publicly proposed "an alternative implementation concept for conserving Wing Lee Street" (the alternative implementation concept) on 16 March this year for reference by the Town Planning Board (TPB). At its meeting on 19 March this year, the TPB rejected the URA's application in relation to the Master Layout Plan for the Staunton Street/Wing Lee Street Development Scheme submitted earlier by the URA, but it agreed that preservation of all the tenement buildings at Wing Lee Street as proposed in the alternative implementation concept was the right direction. It has been nine months since the URA announced the alternative implementation concept, but the TPB has not yet decided on the way forward for Wing Lee Street, and the affected residents have not yet received any compensation or rehousing offers from the URA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *whether it knows the progress to date of the alternative implementation concept proposed by the URA, and whether the*