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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 17 May 2011**

**Monitoring of radiation contamination of food products
imported from Japan**

Purpose

This paper provides background information relating to the monitoring of radiation contamination of food products imported from Japan and summarizes the concerns of Members about the safety of food imported from Japan raised at the special meeting of the Panel on Security held on 19 March 2011.

Background

2. According to the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Brief on an order made under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) (G.N. (E.) 11 of 2011) ("the Order") dated 23 March 2011 (Ref.: FHB/F/5/1/37), the Administration stated that owing to the massive earthquake and the subsequent tsunami which happened in Japan on 11 March 2011, the Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture was damaged, leading to release of radioactive substances in the environment. Japanese authorities have examined the food products and announced that the radioactive substances have contaminated certain foods in the prefectures in the vicinity of the nuclear power plant, including Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma. Radiation levels hazardous to human health have been found in foods including various vegetables and milk. In addition, tests conducted by the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety on 23 March 2011 indicating that certain vegetable samples imported from Chiba prefecture of Japan had been contaminated with radioactive substances at such a level hazardous to human health.

3. Section 78B of Cap. 132 empowers the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene ("DFEH") to make an order to prohibit the import and the supply of any food for the period specified in the order. Such an order may only be made if DFEH has reasonable grounds to believe that the making of the order is necessary to prevent or reduce a possibility of danger to public health or to mitigate any adverse consequence of a danger to public health. On 23 March 2011, DFEH made an order under section 78B of Cap. 132 to prohibit the import into and supply within Hong Kong of the following food products which are/were harvested, manufactured, processed or packed on or after 11 March 2011 from five prefectures of Japan, namely, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba with effect from 12:00 noon on 24 March 2011 until further notice -

- (a) All fruits and vegetables;
- (b) All milk, milk beverages, dried milk; and
- (c) All chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, all poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products, unless accompanied by a certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that the radiation levels do not exceed the standards laid down by the Guideline Levels for Radionuclides in Foods Contaminated following a Nuclear or Radiological Emergency.

4. The Order was published in the Gazette on 24 March 2011 and took effect at 12:00 noon on 24 March 2011.

5. A subcommittee was formed at the House Committee meeting on 1 April 2011 to study the Order. The Order is still under scrutiny by the Subcommittee.

Members' concerns

6. In the context of discussing the contingency measures of the Government in response to the nuclear power plant incidents in Japan in March 2011, the Panel on Security discussed issues related to radiation contamination of food products imported from Japan at its special meeting on 19 March 2011.

7. Members expressed concerns about the testing of food imported from Japan. According to the Administration, since 12 March 2011, the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") had stepped up surveillance on fresh food imported from Japan, including vegetables, fruits and milk, which amounted to around 1% to

5% of total import. Up to the afternoon of 18 March 2011, 121 food samples had been tested and all results were satisfactory.

8. Regarding the standard adopted in the testing the radiation level of food imported from Japan, Members were informed that CFS adopted the standards laid down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in the "Guidelines Levels for Radionuclides in Food following Accidental Nuclear Contamination" in testing the radiation level of food.

9. Noting that some parents in Hong Kong had been feeding their babies with Japanese powdered milk only, Members were concerned whether there would be an adequate supply of powdered milk from Japan in the coming months.

10. The Administration advised that it had been informed by Japanese powdered milk suppliers that several thousand boxes of Japanese powdered milk would arrive Hong Kong shortly. The Administration would monitor the supply and sale of such powdered milk. Since the ingredients of all powdered milks were similar regardless of their origins, parents could consider feeding their babies with powdered milks produced by other countries.

The Panel's visit

11. Arising from the concern over the safety of food products imported from Japan, the Panel conducted a visit to the Airport Food Inspection Office on 8 April 2011. Members were briefed on the examination of radiation level in food imported from Japan after the Daiichi nuclear power plant incident, and viewed demonstrations on radioactivity screening of food by hand-held survey meter and operation of contamination monitoring system.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on monitoring of radiation contamination of
food products imported from Japan**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	16.3.2011	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 10-33 (Question raised by Hon Alan LEONG, Hon KAM Nai-wai and Hon Paul TSE under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure)
Legislative Council	17.3.2011	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 45-80 (Motion for the adjournment of the Council)
Panel on Security	19.3.2011 (Item I)	Agenda LC Paper No. CB(2)1303/10-11(01)
—	—	LegCo Brief on an order made under section 78B of Cap. 132 (Ref.: FHB/F/5/1/37)
House Committee	1.4.2011 (Item IV)	Agenda LC Paper No. LS 43/10-11