
FACT SHEET

Review of the moratorium on the issue of marine fish culture licence

1. Introduction

1.1 Mariculture involves rearing of marine fish from fry or fingerlings to marketable size in cages suspended by floating rafts in sheltered coastal areas. Mariculture in Hong Kong is regulated by the *Marine Fish Culture Ordinance* (Cap. 353) which requires all mariculture operations to be conducted in designated fish culture zones under licences issued by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD").

1.2 The Government introduced a moratorium on the issue of new marine fish culture licence in 1987 to reduce the possible impact of mariculture on the marine environment. The number of marine fish culture licensees gradually reduced from 1 854 in 1987 to about 1 015 in 2011¹. Recently, the Government has been conducting a review of the moratorium with a view to promoting the development of mariculture in Hong Kong.

1.3 This fact sheet provides information on the mariculture sector in Hong Kong, the review of the moratorium on the issue of marine fish culture licence, and previous deliberations related to the issue at the Legislative Council.

2. Mariculture sector in Hong Kong

2.1 At present, there are 26 fish culture zones designated under Cap. 353, occupying a total sea area of 209 hectares. Majority of the mariculture licensees are operating small, family-based farms having an average farm size of about 280 square metres.

¹ Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (2012b) and Government Information Services (1988).

2.2 In 2011, the estimated mariculture production was about 1 185 tonnes, down from 1 512 tonnes in 2010. The total value of production in 2011 was HK\$94 million, down from HK\$118 million in 2010. The mariculture production in 2011 accounted for around 8% of all locally consumed live marine fish².

2.3 The Government established the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries ("the Committee")³ in 2006 to study the long-term directions for the sustainable development of the fisheries industry in Hong Kong. According to the report submitted by the Committee in 2010, the aquaculture industry in Hong Kong, including mariculture and fish pond culture, has been facing a number of challenges such as:

- (a) strong competition from imported aquatic products;
- (b) inadequate aquaculture technologies;
- (c) limited choices and supply of fry;
- (d) uncompetitive production costs;
- (e) the moratorium on the issue of new marine fish culture licence; and
- (f) idling marine fish culture rafts.

² Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (2012b) and Information Services Department (2012).

³ The Committee was chaired by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation and comprised Legislative Council Members, representatives from relevant Government departments, representatives from the fisheries industry, and academics and experts from various fields.

3. Review of the moratorium on the issue of marine fish culture licence

3.1 In the report submitted to the Government in 2010, the Committee has recommended a number of measures to promote the sustainable development of aquaculture in Hong Kong. One of these measures is a review of the moratorium on the issue of new marine fish culture licence⁴.

3.2 The Government has indicated that AFCD has been following-up with relevant bureaux and departments on the recommendation of the Committee on conducting a review of the moratorium on the issue of new marine fish culture licence and other related recommendations on promoting the development of the mariculture industry. The Government pointed out that advances in mariculture techniques in recent years, such as the use of pellet feed, have significantly reduced the impact of mariculture on the marine environment, and hence, believed that the recommendation of the Committee on conducting a review of the moratorium was worth considering.

4. Deliberations at the Legislative Council

4.1 The subject of the review of the moratorium on the issue of marine fish culture licence has not been discussed in detail at the Legislative Council. However, the Government indicated its intention to conduct a review of the moratorium on several occasions, including:

⁴ The Committee has suggested other measures to promote the development of the aquaculture industry, including: (a) exploring new fish culture areas and the expansion or rotation of existing fish culture zones; (b) enhancing the supply of quality fish fry; (c) stepping up efforts to develop new culture species and improve the quality of cultured fish; (d) developing local fisheries product markets; and (e) attracting and assisting interested parties and fishermen to join the industry.

- (a) at the Council meeting of 15 December 2010 when a Member enquired, among other things, how the Government would assist fishermen affected by the proposed trawl ban⁵ to switch to the aquaculture industry;
- (b) at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Protection (Specification of Apparatus) (Amendment) Notice 2011 on 13 April 2011 when members discussed the measures to be taken by the Government to assist fishermen affected by the proposed trawl ban to switch to mariculture operations; and
- (c) at the Council meeting of 15 February 2012 when a Member enquired, among other things, whether the Government would consider relaxing the use of additional land and waters to provide more room for development of the agriculture and fisheries industries.

⁵ Ban on trawling is one of the measures proposed by the Committee to control fishing effort of capture fisheries in Hong Kong waters in order to conserve the marine resources and promote the sustainable development of the local fisheries industry. In the 2010-2011 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Government would implement a package of management measures such as banning trawling in Hong Kong waters through legislation in order to restore the marine resources. The legislative amendment to ban trawling was passed at the Legislation Council in 2011. The trawl ban will take effect from 31 December 2012.

References

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