

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 6 April 2016**

Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
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Chairman and Honourable Members,

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) 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 2015-16 Estimates, about \$7 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene", representing an increase of about \$300 million (4.4%) over the previous year and accounting for 2% of recurrent government expenditure.

3. ☐ New resources available in this financial year are mainly used to provide –

- additional funding of about \$172 million for FEHD to strengthen enforcement work in public markets and illegal shop front extensions, and cope with the rise in outsourcing contract price;
- additional funding of about \$34 million for FEHD to implement a new licensing regime after the enactment of the Private Columnaria Bill, and strengthen our work on promoting green burial;
- additional funding of about \$24 million for FEHD to sustain the cleansing efforts and environmental hygiene services delivered under the "Keep Clean 2015 @ Hong Kong: Our Home" Campaign;
- provision of about \$15 million for conducting food safety related surveys and studies, including the on-going surveys relating to the supply of powdered formulae, development of guidelines for good practice in using "re-used oils" for reference by the

catering industry, as well as other studies relating to regulatory proposals on food safety;

- additional funding of about \$8 million per year for a period of three years for AFCD to enhance its capacity for testing of equine infectious diseases;
- additional funding of about \$7 million for FHB to provide secretariat support and legal advisory service for the Fishermen Claims Appeal Board; and
- additional funding of about \$6 million for AFCD to implement measures in support of the New Agriculture Policy (NAP).

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

New Agriculture Policy

5. As announced in the 2016 Policy Address, the Government would implement the NAP to promote the modernisation and sustainable development of the local agricultural industry. New measures include establishing an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park); examining the feasibility of identifying Agriculture Priority Areas in the New Territories that have higher value for agricultural activities; and setting up a \$500 million Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF).

6. In February, we commissioned a feasibility study with a view to setting the initial boundary of the Agri-Park and drawing up the detailed implementation plan. In addition, we are proceeding to seek funding approval from the Finance Committee within this quarter for setting up the SADF. Other supportive measures will be implemented progressively.

Testing and Transportation Hub for Competition Horses

7. Hong Kong has a highly regarded and vibrant horse racing industry. In the past few years, the Hong Kong Jockey Club has been collaborating with Mainland authorities on the development of the Club's equine training centre in Guangzhou as a training venue for Hong Kong's competition horses. In support of the development, we will strengthen the testing services for equine infectious diseases at the veterinary laboratory of AFCD. Not only will this help enhance Hong Kong's capability in

laboratory testing and scientific research, it will also facilitate Hong Kong's development into a testing centre of equine infectious diseases and a transportation hub for international competition horses.

Prevention and Control of Avian Influenza (AI) and the Future of the Live Poultry Trade

8. The threat of AI persisted in the past year. In Europe, the United States and Southeast Asia, cases of infection among birds were recorded. In Hong Kong, the H5N6 AI virus was detected thrice in wild bird carcasses in the first two months of this year. In the Mainland, a number of human infection cases involving the H5N6 and H7N9 AI viruses had been recorded over the past year or so. Whilst we have over the years built up a surveillance and control system that effectively reduces the AI risks in Hong Kong, no surveillance system can attain zero risk. We should all stay alert in guarding against the risk of outbreaks in Hong Kong.

9. As for our policy in the long term, the Government commissioned a consultant last year to study the future of the live poultry trade including whether the sale of live poultry should continue in Hong Kong and make recommendations. We hope to complete the study within the second quarter of this year and thereafter consult the public on the consultant's recommendations.

Food Safety

10. On the food safety front, we will formulate specific regulatory proposals in respect of the regulation of edible fats and oils, as well as nutrition and health claims for formula products and prepackaged food for infants and young children under the age of 36 months. In working out the details of the proposed regulation, we will take into full account the views collected during the public consultation, including the views of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council, and ensure that the proposals meet the requirements of the World Trade Organization. As for the regulation of the level of metallic contaminants in food, we plan to conduct public consultation this year.

Clean Hong Kong Campaign and Mosquito Prevention and Control

11. The Government launched a two-month "Keep Clean 2015 @ Hong Kong: Our Home" Campaign in August last year. To sustain our work in this aspect, we will allocate additional resources to relevant departments this year. This will include, among other things, the

aforementioned additional funding of about \$24 million for FEHD to provide more street washing services and enhance cleansing services.

12. As before, the Government is committed to carrying out effective mosquito prevention and control work through flexible deployment of resources, comprehensive surveillance programmes, as well as publicity and education measures, with a view to reducing the risk of outbreaks of dengue fever and Zika cases in Hong Kong.

Improving the Operating Environment of Public Markets

13. In respect of public markets, we are now actively following up the specific improvement proposals for Sheung Fung Street Market and Lockhart Road Market put forward by the consultant, and have completed the consultations with the relevant Market Management Consultative Committees (MMCCs). We will also follow up the improvement works for the other four markets as soon as possible. Besides, we have earmarked about \$68 million this year to pursue improvement works for several other public markets.

14. Separately, the Government has lowered the threshold of tenants' support for the retrofitting of air-conditioning systems in public markets from 85% to 80% in July 2015. The Government will consult the respective MMCCs again and in the light of their views conduct questionnaire surveys on the installation of air-conditioning systems in the markets concerned. After the lowering of the threshold, two markets have obtained a support rate of more than 80% among tenants, and we will actively follow up the cases. As regards Tai Wai Market which had already obtained adequate tenants' support before the lowering of the threshold, we will bid for resources in accordance with the established mechanism to take forward the retrofitting of air-conditioning system, subject to the results of the technical feasibility study being conducted by the Architectural Services Department.

Hawker Policy

15. As I have pointed out previously on a number of occasions, the Government keeps an open mind towards proposals for establishing open-air hawker bazaars at any locations and believes that it will be desirable to adopt a district-led and bottom-up approach. If any organisations can identify suitable sites for setting up such bazaars and secure support from the local community and the respective District Councils (DCs), the Government will provide assistance as long as food safety and environmental hygiene are not compromised and public passageways are not obstructed. As for the several

proposals we received in November last year, we have written to the Chairmen of the respective DCs and invited them to facilitate the discussion of the proposals at the DCs.

Columbarium Policy

16. As for the columbarium development scheme, we have obtained the support of relevant DCs for the columbarium projects on eight potential sites identified, involving over 450 000 new niches. Among them, the 160 000 niches at Tsang Tsui could be completed by 2019 the earliest. This year, we will continue to consult the DCs on several other columbarium projects. We hope to have the support of the local community for these projects.

17. In regulating private columbaria, we will continue to work closely with the Bills Committee on Private Columbaria Bill, with a view to having the Bill enacted within the current legislative year. Prior to the passage of the Bill, the Government will continue to step up public education to advise consumers to exercise care when purchasing niches from private columbaria, and consider renting a niche on a short-term basis. Before the commencement of the relevant legislation, members of the public are advised to refrain from making rash decisions on the purchase of niches.

Animal Welfare

18. The Government attaches great importance to the promotion of animal welfare and enhancement of animal management. To better regulate animal trading and tighten regulation of dog breeders and traders, we have completed the drafting work of the relevant legislative amendments and plan to introduce the amendment regulation to the Legislative Council in May. We have reserved additional resources and manpower to deal with the enforcement work arising from the implementation of the new regulatory framework.

Fisheries Development

19. With regard to fisheries development, the Government has set up a Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) to help fishermen adopt a sustainable and high value-added operation mode, and to provide funding to programmes and researches that help enhance the overall competitiveness of the industry.

20. In addition, through the Fisheries Development Loan Fund,

fishermen may obtain loans at low interest rate for switching to sustainable fisheries operations or related operations. We will continue to assist the local fisheries industry to move towards sustainable development.

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