

**For discussion
on 16 May 2017**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

Safety of Pet Food Products in Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on issues relating to the safety of pet food products in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. The term ‘pet food’ covers a wide range of ‘foods’ for different species. In general, it refers to feed for dogs and cats, as well as other common pets, such as birds and rabbits. Among pets in Hong Kong, dogs and cats are most common. According to the Study on the Development of the Veterinary Profession in Hong Kong¹ released in May 2017, 10.9% of the 2.4 million households own dogs or cats which represent 73.6% of pet-owning households. It was estimated that about 297,500 dogs and 213,100 cats were being kept by households between mid-2015 to mid-2016 in Hong Kong.

3. For the purpose of this paper, pet food is broadly categorised into commercial pet food and homemade pet food. Commercial pet food is usually pre-packaged/processed food available in the market for pet consumption, which may be available in the form of dry food, wet food, semi-moist food, freeze-dried food and frozen food. Homemade pet food refers to food made or cooked from fresh ingredients for pets by their owners. The past years see a growing tendency for pet owners to feed their pets with commercial pet food. According to the information gathered by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) from some pet food companies, it is estimated that about 70% of pet owners in Hong Kong feed their pets with commercial pet food.

¹ Commissioned by the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong with the administrative support and assistance of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department.

4. At present, the supply and use of fodder for food-production animals is subject to regulatory control under the Public Health (Animal and Birds) (Chemical Residues) Regulations (Cap. 139 sub. leg. N). Pet food in general is not subject to regulation in Hong Kong in respect of its production, import or distribution.

PET FOOD PRODUCTS IN HONG KONG

(a) Source of Pet Food Products

5. We are not aware of any major production of pet food locally. Commercial pet food is largely imported from places outside Hong Kong. According to statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, dog and cat food imports amounted to 37.8 million Kg in 2016. The United States (US) is the largest source of pre-packaged/processed pet food of Hong Kong, accounting for over 40% of the pet food imported in 2016. Other major sources include some member states of the European Union (EU), Thailand, Canada and the Mainland.

(b) Complaints Received

6. According to the Consumer Council, it receives about 20 complaints with regard to pet food products every year. Most of the complaints received were related to the quality of pet food products, or pet food being suspected to have caused illness of pets or contained foreign substances. Other common complaints included those related to delivery and sales practices. A breakdown of these complaints since 2014 is listed below-

Table 1. Complaints with regard to pet food products received by the Consumer Council

	2014	2015	2016
Quality of Goods	14	6	10
Late/Non-Delivery/Loss	3	6	1
Sales Practices	3	1	1
Price Dispute	2	1	3
Expiry Date	1	2	2
Others	1	4	4
Total:	24	20	21

7. Separately, AFCD has received a total of ten complaints from the public with regard to pet food products sold in Hong Kong since 2014. Most of these complaints were related to the hygiene and quality of pet food suspected to have caused illness of pets. A breakdown of these complaints is listed below –

Table 2. Complaints with regard to pet food products received by AFCD

	2014	2015	2016	2017 Q1
Hygiene and quality of pet food suspected to have caused illness of pets	1	4	1	1
Manufacturing and sales	-	1	2	-
Total:	1	5	3	1

OUR OBSERVATION

8. On the safety of pet food, there are at present no commonly adopted standards at the international level. Major pet food exporters, such as the US and the EU, have a rather prominent pet food manufacturing industry, supplying both the domestic as well as export markets. These places have put in place regulations governing the manufacture, packaging, labelling and distribution of pet food products, and have set safety standards on their own, such as on hygiene and hazard control standards, the use of additives, and standards regarding undesirable substances.

9. We have not come across major incidents concerning the safety of pet food in Hong Kong in recent years. Indeed, most of the pet food products available in Hong Kong are imported from places where the same products are being consumed in their domestic markets.

STUDY ON PET FOOD SAFETY

10. Although there have been no major pet food incidents in recent years, in order to enable us to assess, on a more informed basis, whether and the extent to which the safety of pet food is a concern, AFCD will soon commission a study to test pet food products available in the Hong Kong market.

11. The contractor of the study will conduct sampling and testing of commercial pet food products in Hong Kong. It is planned that, over a period of two years, a total of six rounds of random sampling of pet food products will be conducted. Majority of the samples will be drawn from the most common forms of pet food products for dogs and cats, such as dry food and canned food, with the remaining samples comprising semi-moist food, freeze-dried food, and frozen food and feed for other species like birds and rodents. Each round will sample 60 pet food products, resulting in a total of 360 pet food products tested by the end of the study. A number of harmful substances and microbes, such as Salmonella, Aflatoxin and Melamine, and certain heavy metal, etc. will be tested with reference to the standards adopted in some overseas jurisdictions. Upon completion of the study, we should have a better understanding of the safety of commercial pet food in Hong Kong vis-à-vis other places.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and offer comments on issues relating to the safety of pet food products in Hong Kong.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
May 2017**