

立法會
Legislative Council

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by the Administration)

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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 13 July 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH, JP
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP

Members attending : Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP

Members absent : Hon CHAN Han-pan, BBS, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN

Public Officers : Item III

Dr CHUI Tak-yi, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Ms Chelsea WONG Wing-chee
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1

Dr Edwin TSUI Lok-kin
Controller, Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Samuel YEUNG Tze-kiu
Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and
Communication), Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Item IV

Dr CHUI Tak-yi, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Ms Teresa CHEUNG Shuk-kau
Senior Principal Executive Officer (Food)
Food and Health Bureau

Dr Edwin TSUI Lok-kin
Controller, Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Jackie LEUNG Ching-kan
Assistant Director (Risk Management), Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Josephine SO
Chief Council Secretary (2) 2

Staff in attendance : Ms Wendy LO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Cally LAI
Legislative Assistant (2) 2

Miss Pansy KWONG
Legislative Assistant (2) 9

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I. Information paper issued since the last meeting

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

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II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1267/20-21(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following two items at the next regular meeting to be held on Tuesday, 14 September 2021 at 2:30 pm:

- (a) Improvement of management and hygiene conditions of public toilets: Administration's follow-up actions in response to the recommendations made in the respective report of The Ombudsman published in May 2021 and the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Improvement of Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape; and
- (b) Promotion of green burial.

III. Findings of the Second Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1267/20-21(03) and (04))

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Food and Health ("USFH") briefed Members on the major findings of the Second Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey ("Second FCS") conducted by the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1267/20-21(03)). Members noted the background brief on relevant issues prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(2)1267/20-21(04)).

Sampling method adopted in the Second FCS

4. Mr Tony TSE considered that the food consumption data of the local population derived from the First Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey ("First FCS") and the Second FCS could provide a scientific basis for CFS to assess the potential food safety risk that the population might face due to their exposure to various harmful substances through daily food consumption and to formulate and implement appropriate food safety control measures accordingly. In response to Mr TSE's enquiry about the methodologies adopted for sampling in conducting the Second FCS, Controller/CFS and Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication)/CFS ("C(CM)(RAC)/CFS") advised that the survey adopted the internationally-recognized "24-hour dietary recall" method on two non-consecutive days by inviting the respondents to recall all food and drinks consumed over the previous day of each interview and prompting follow-up

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questions with reference to the responses given, with a view to collecting comprehensive information on the daily diet and intake amounts of the respondents. To reflect the regular food consumption pattern and dietary habits of the respondents, the two non-consecutive days of "24-hour dietary recall" interviews were not only conducted on weekends (accounted for 13.5% of interviews), but also on weekdays (accounted for 86.5% of interviews).

5. Mr Tony TSE noted from the Second FCS report that around 50% of the (weighted) respondents was aged 50 or over. As for the First FCS conducted in 2005-2007, only 36% of the (weighted) respondents fell into that age group. He was concerned whether such difference in the age composition had affected the comparison of various statistics covering all respondents as compiled in the two FCSs. Controller/CFS and C(CM)(RAC)/CFS responded that in respect of the Second FCS, the weighted distribution of respondents by sex and age was compiled by making reference to the distribution of population by sex and age as found in the General Household Survey of the Census and Statistics Department ("C&SD") of the relevant period, so as to present a complete picture for the target population.

6. The Chairman asked whether the Second FCS had collected any data/information on food consumed by population groups of different income levels or demographic characteristics (e.g. low-income families living in subdivided units, elderly persons living in elderly homes/residential care homes or street sleepers), as such information could throw light on the dietary habits of different socio-demographic groups in Hong Kong.

7. Controller/CFS responded that the main objective of conducting FCSs was to collect food consumption information of the general public in Hong Kong, particularly the types and amounts of food consumed. While basic anthropometric and demographic information of the respondents were also obtained in FCSs for facilitating the interpretation of the food consumption information collected, income level of target groups as referred to by the Chairman was not collected. C(CM)(RAC)/CFS supplemented that the Second FCS was a household survey targeting the Hong Kong adult population. The target respondents were the land-based non-institutional population of Hong Kong aged 18 or above. A two-stage sampling design was adopted in the survey. First, a representative sample list containing replicates of quarters was drawn from the database "Frame of Quarters" maintained by C&SD. One target respondent from each household of the living quarters was then randomly selected for the interview through the Kish grid method. Whilst people living in subdivided units were included in the survey, those living in elderly homes/residential care homes or street sleepers were excluded. The Chairman opined that as quite a large number of elderly persons lived in elderly homes/residential care homes, the Administration should consider including them in future surveys.

Findings of the Second FCS

8. In response to Ms YUNG Hoi-yan's enquiry, C(CM)(RAC)/CFS advised that the Second FCS had obtained an updated set of food consumption data comprising the average daily intake amounts of 30 food groups, 160 food subgroups and over 1 500 food items (including snacks, sugars and confectionery) consumed by the local population.

9. The Chairman expressed concern that the key findings of the Second FCS as set out in paragraph 7 of the Administration's paper did not provide any comparison of food consumption data as compiled in the First and Second FCSs. He sought details of the changes identified in the food consumption pattern of the local population since the completion of the First FCS as well as the corresponding measures to be taken by relevant government departments in response to the latest dietary habits of the public.

10. Controller/CFS responded that the Second FCS had collected updated information on the food consumption of the Hong Kong population, which was crucial in CFS' conducting risk assessment to evaluate food safety risks scientifically and to provide substantiation of any new regulatory measures to control the existing or emerging food safety risks in the local context. The Second FCS had revealed, among others, that the average daily intake of some high-risk food items (such as sashimi and sushi) in the local population had noticeably increased. In respect of the consumption of vegetables and fruits, the average total intake amount in general was insufficient when compared against the total intake amount recommended for the prevention of non-communicable diseases, especially for males and those aged 18-29. In light of the above findings, CFS would step up publicity on the potential food safety risks associated with consumption of relatively high-risk food items. CFS would also share with relevant government departments (e.g. Department of Health ("DH")) the findings of the Second FCS to facilitate their related work, e.g. planning for publicity programmes to promote healthy diet.

11. The Chairman suggested that when reporting the findings of future FCSs, the Administration should provide detailed comparisons of food consumption data collected in different FCSs, analyses of the changes in food consumption pattern of the local population, as well as corresponding risk management or control measures devised/adopted by CFS.

12. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about CFS' next step of work with the readiness of an updated set of food consumption data, Controller/CFS advised that CFS would apply the data in its relevant work, including conducting day-to-day food safety risk assessments and studies, reviewing the

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sampling strategy of its routine Food Surveillance Programme ("FSP"), as well as assessing and proposing amendments to local food safety standards and regulations. It was noteworthy that the findings of the First FCS had been widely applied in CFS' work on various fronts including completion of a Total Diet Study ("TDS") covering a wide range of chemicals in 2014 based on the food consumption data. CFS would plan ahead for and conduct the Second TDS, with a view to updating and understanding the exposure to individual harmful substances through dietary intake among various population groups in Hong Kong, thereby assessing any associated health risks. CFS would also commence an FCS for the younger population covering secondary and primary school students within 2021. The Chairman requested the Administration to brief the Panel on the progress and findings of the Second TDS in due course.

FCS to be launched for secondary and primary school students

13. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan sought details of the sampling method to be adopted for the specifically designed FCS targeting secondary and primary school students. Expressing concern about the problem of overweight or obesity among teenagers, she hoped that CFS could collect through the survey more information on the dietary habits of students and devise, in collaboration with DH, targeted measures and publicity programmes to promote healthy lifestyle and balanced diet among teenagers.

14. Controller/CFS and C(CM)(RAC)/CFS responded that CFS planned to commence the specifically designed FCS for secondary and primary school students in the third quarter of 2021, with a sampling size of about 1 300 students. All secondary and primary school students in the territory would be subject to the sample selection; and about 50 schools would be selected for the survey. Subject to the consent of the parents, the Administration's target was to individually interview about 20 to 40 students randomly selected from each surveyed school through the holding of Zoom meetings. Every student would be interviewed twice and each interview would last for about 45 to 60 minutes. The survey would adopt the "24-hour dietary recall" method to collect information on foods and drinks consumed in two specific 24-hour periods.

15. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan expressed concern that primary school students might have difficulty in providing answers in a precise manner to some of the questions (e.g. the amount of certain food items consumed which was measured in serving/gram/tael). She asked whether the Administration would consider collecting food consumption data from the younger age groups by asking the respondents to complete questionnaires so that they could provide answers in writing or, if they wished, attach drawings or photos to illustrate the amount of food they had consumed.

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16. Controller/CFS and C(CM)(RAC)/CFS responded that a pilot test had been conducted recently to field test the methodologies for the survey. The pilot test had indicated that there were merits for interviewers to conduct the survey, as they could put forward follow-up questions with reference to the responses given by the young children to collect comprehensive information on their daily diet and intake amounts. To minimize reporting errors and ensure data quality, the interviewers would show sample bowl, plate, cup, spoon as well as photos of utensils in other sizes during the online interview to help the respondents estimate the amount of food consumed. Besides, photos showing various food items in specific quantities and their relevant weight were available to help the respondents estimate the consumed amount of each item relative to the photo. Parents/guardians/caregivers of primary school students would be most welcome to observe the online interview and offer assistance to the students.

IV. Impact of the discharge of wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the ocean on food safety and import control on Japanese food

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1267/20-21(05) to (08))

17. At the invitation of the Chairman, USFH briefed Members on the follow-up actions undertaken by the Food and Health Bureau ("FHB") and CFS in response to the plan announced by the Japanese Government to discharge the wastewater generated in the process of cooling the reactors at the Fukushima nuclear power station ("FNPS") into the ocean, and the possible impact of the wastewater discharge on food safety and import control of Japanese food, as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1267/20-21(05)).

Impact of the wastewater discharge and corresponding response measures

18. Members, including the Chairman, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Dr Junius HO, Ms YUNG Hoi-yan, Mr LUK Chung-hung, Mr Kenneth LAU and Mr Tony TSE expressed deep concern that the discharge of wastewater generated from FNPS into the ocean would have adverse impact on the marine ecosystem, the food chain and food safety. They enquired how FHB, CFS and relevant government departments would respond to the nuclear wastewater discharge plan of Japan. The Chairman noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ("MFA") of China had issued a statement in April 2021, expressing dissatisfaction about the Japanese Government's decision to discharge nuclear wastewater into the ocean. He asked whether the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("the HKSAR Government") supported the content of the said statement.

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19. In response, Controller/CFS advised that the Administration understood that many organizations, fishery operators and members of the public were concerned that the discharge of wastewater into the ocean would have a serious impact on the marine ecosystem, the food chain and food safety. The Administration was equally concerned about the impact of the discharge plan and hence, had demanded the Japanese authorities to provide data on various aspects and information on control and surveillance, including the method and actual location of the wastewater discharge, the list and the concentration of the radionuclides in the wastewater, the frequency and volume of discharge, the monitoring programme on the wastewater treatment and the surrounding environment, as well as alternative methods to handle the wastewater. FHB had relayed clearly to the Japanese authorities that they should respond proactively to the concerns of the international community and the public, and disclose all information relating to the wastewater discharge plan of FNPS in a highly transparent manner, in order to maintain the public's confidence in the safety of imported food from Japan. Since the wastewater contained various radionuclides, FHB had made it clear to the Japanese authorities that they should not discharge the wastewater from FNPS into the ocean unilaterally without the consensus of the international community in order to avoid causing irreversible damage to the environment.

20. Senior Principal Executive Officer (Food)/FHB ("SPEO(F)/FHB") added that pollution to the ocean was an international issue in the realm of foreign affairs. The Administration had relayed the concerns of various sectors to the Office of the Commissioner of MFA in Hong Kong and noted that MFA had urged the Japanese authorities to properly handle the wastewater generated from FNPS. The Administration fully supported MFA's urge.

21. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan asked whether relevant government departments had conducted any studies to assess the impact of the discharge plan on Hong Kong in various aspects and to determine the corresponding measures to be adopted to mitigate the impact. She further asked whether and under what circumstances CFS would consider imposing an import ban on all food products from Japan. In Ms YUNG's view, the HKSAR Government should set up a crisis management committee (comprising representatives from relevant government departments and professionals with expertise in the relevant fields) to work out action plans and mitigation measures in response to emergencies arising from the wastewater discharge plan.

22. Controller/CFS responded that FHB and CFS would (a) carefully examine the information provided by the Japanese authorities and the assessments made by international expert organizations, etc.; and (b) conduct risk assessments with relevant government departments, as appropriate, to determine whether monitoring work on Japanese food should be adjusted accordingly and whether additional measures were required to ensure food

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safety and safeguard public health. Depending on the circumstances, CFS might require more Japanese food imports to be accompanied by radiation certificates, increase the tests on imported Japanese food and tighten import control on food products (including agricultural and fishery products) from related areas in Japan. SPEO(F)/FHB added that FHB and CFS had held meetings and maintained close liaison with relevant government departments (including the Hong Kong Observatory, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and DH) in working out corresponding response plans to cater for different scenarios.

23. Mr Tony TSE said that as Japanese food was popular among Hong Kong people and Hong Kong was the largest export market for Japanese food products, the Administration should be particularly cautious in its work on the food safety front. Although CFS had stepped up the surveillance on Japanese food, there had been media reports that incorrect information involving places of origin (e.g. cities/prefectures) were shown on the package labels of some food products imported from Japan. He asked whether CFS had followed up on those cases.

24. Controller/CFS responded that following the incident at FNPS in 2011, CFS had exercised import control on certain high-risk food products from affected Japanese prefectures and adopted a risk-based principle in conducting radiation tests on food products imported from Japan under the routine FSP. Over the past 10 years, CFS had tested a total of more than 750 000 samples of such products and none of the samples were found to have radiation levels exceeding the guideline levels adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. In CFS' regular inspection of Japanese food, no irregularity in relation to food labelling had been found so far. If there were suspected cases of contravention of the food labelling requirements involving Japanese food products, CFS would inform the Japanese authorities and conduct investigations with the relevant departments.

25. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that during his visit to Fukushima with representatives of the food trade in June 2019, he noticed that the Japanese authorities had put in place a robust testing programme and radiation checks were conducted on all of their food products. As CFS also conducted radiation tests on Japanese food following a risk-based approach under FSP to ensure food safety, he was not worried about the safety of Japanese food imported into Hong Kong. In his view, CFS should tighten the monitoring by increasing the number of radiation tests on Japanese food if the Japanese Government decided to discharge the wastewater two years later.

26. Mr LUK Chung-hung noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency ("IAEA") had proposed to set up a technical working group to follow up on and monitor Japan's discharge of the nuclear wastewater. As IAEA had confirmed that it would invite experts from the Mainland to join the technical

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working group, he considered that the HKSAR Government should closely monitor the development of the matter, including the risk assessments made by the technical working group regarding Japan's wastewater discharge plan. USFH and Controller/CFS responded that the Administration would maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities and closely keep in view comments of the IAEA technical working group.

27. Dr Junius HO opined that the Administration should toe the line of the Mainland Government regarding Japan's wastewater discharge plan and take proactive follow-up actions. In his view, CFS had been too passive in enforcing regulatory control over the import of Japanese food. As Hong Kong was a major export market for Japanese food products, the Administration should make it clear to the Japanese Government that if Japan discharged nuclear wastewater into the ocean unilaterally in the absence of the international community's consensus, the HKSAR Government would consider imposing a total ban on import of Japanese food products.

28. To facilitate understanding of the magnitude of the impact if a total ban on import and sale within Hong Kong of all Japanese food was imposed due to radiation contamination problems, Dr Junius HO requested the Administration to provide the following information/figures recorded in the past three years:

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- (a) among the total volume of food exported from Japan to other countries worldwide, the percentage share of food products exported to Hong Kong; and
- (b) the types, quantities/volume and values of various groups of Japanese food products imported into Hong Kong.

Controller/CFS said that the Administration would provide a written response after the meeting, while advising that according to the information provided by C&SD, about 70 000 tonnes of Japanese food products were imported into Hong Kong in 2020.

29. The Chairman considered that the discharge of nuclear wastewater into the ocean would not only cause adverse impact on food safety, but also severely affect the food supply, the operation of the fisheries industry and the business of catering premises serving Japanese cuisine. In the Chairman's view, requiring more Japanese food imports to be accompanied by radiation certificates and/or increasing the tests on imported Japanese food were only passive measures on the food safety front. He called on CFS and relevant government departments to assess the impact of the discharge plan on various sectors and work out response plans well ahead of the commencement of the discharge. For instance, FHB and CFS should, in collaboration with the

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Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, start assessing the impact of a stricter import control on Japanese food on the food supply in Hong Kong and how the local market could reduce reliance on Japanese food products if a stricter control had to be imposed.

30. USFH responded that the Administration noted Members' views on the matter. As advised earlier, FHB and CFS would carefully examine the information provided by the Japanese authorities and the assessments made by international expert organizations, and conduct risk assessments with relevant government departments to determine the corresponding measures to be adopted on various fronts.

31. Mr KWOK Wai-keung considered that CFS should keep monitoring whether food products imported from Japan contained any radioactive substances, particularly those grown/produced after the Japanese Government had started discharging wastewater into the ocean. The surveillance results should be made available to the public so that they would be aware of the safety level of imported Japanese food, enabling them to arrive at informed choices. Controller/CFS responded that CFS would study how to disseminate the relevant information to the public. He stressed that depending on the information provided by the Japanese authorities and the risk assessments made by international organizations, the Administration would not rule out tightening import control on food products from related areas in Japan.

Existing import control on Japanese food products

32. Mr LUK Chung-hung noted that the United States Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") had issued Import Alert #99-33 to prohibit the import of food products (including milk, butter, dried milk, milk-based infant formulae and other milk products, vegetables and vegetable products, rice, whole grain, fish, meat and poultry, venus clams, sea urchin, yuzu fruit and kiwi fruit) from Fukushima and 14 other Japanese prefectures due to radionuclide contamination. He asked whether the import restrictions imposed by CFS on Japanese food were more stringent than those by FDA.

33. Controller/CFS responded that the list of food products prohibited from import to the United States as set out in the Import Alert #99-33 was basically the same as the list of food products prohibited from export by the Japanese Government. FDA's list was updated from time to time in accordance with the revision to the list of food products prohibited from export by the Japanese Government. As compared to the United States' food control list, Hong Kong's control measures on Japanese food products were in fact more stringent. For instance, apart from food products prohibited for export by the Japanese authorities, all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Fukushima were prohibited for import into Hong Kong.

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34. Mr Kenneth LAU learned from press reports that some wineries had moved their plants/plantation to areas close to FNPS, arousing public concerns as to whether liquor products (e.g. Sake) from those wineries would be contaminated by polluted water deep underground. He asked, apart from taking samples of Japanese liquor products at the import level for testing, whether the Administration would consider imposing a stricter import control on liquor products from Fukushima. Mr LUK Chung-hung noted with concern that while all fruits from Fukushima were prohibited for import into Hong Kong, it had been reported by the media that juice products made of fruits from Fukushima were imported into Hong Kong and available for sale in the local market.

35. Assistant Director (Risk Management)/CFS advised that in 2020, radiation tests had been conducted on about 38 000 consignments of imported Japanese food products (2% came from Fukushima and the other four neighbouring prefectures (i.e. Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma)). The radiation test results of all samples were satisfactory. From 2018 to 2020, CFS conducted radiation tests on about 34 000 food consignments categorized as "drinks and others" (including wines and juice products) imported from Japan, about 2 400 of which were from Fukushima and the four neighbouring prefectures. The radiation test results were also satisfactory. Controller/CFS added that in the process of making juice products, fruit pulp would be washed and processed, and diluted by other ingredients. Juice products meeting the relevant safety standards would be regarded as safe and fit for human consumption. Hitherto, there had not been any scientific evidence supporting an import ban and/or import restrictions on drinks from Fukushima and the four neighbouring prefectures.

V. Any other business

36. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:54 pm.