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Legislative Council

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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of policy briefing-cum-meeting
held on Tuesday, 12 October 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 2 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 CHAN Han-pan, BBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH, JP
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
- Members attending** : Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding
- Member absent** : Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item II
Professor Sophia CHAN Siu-chee, JP
Secretary for Food and Health

Miss Vivian LAU Lee-kwan, JP
Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)

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

Miss Erica NG Lai-man, JP
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1

Mr Anthony LI Ping-wai
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Ms Irene YOUNG Bick-kwan, JP
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Christine WONG Wang
Controller, Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr LEUNG Siu-fai, JP
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Dr SIN Wai-mei, JP
Government Chemist
Government Laboratory

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

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

Mr Clement HAU
Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Pansy KWONG
Legislative Assistant (2) 2

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

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

II. Briefing by the Secretary for Food and Health on the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1530/20-21(01), The Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address, Policy Address Supplement and Legislative Proposals for the Seventh Term of the Legislative Council, and Report on Northern Metropolis Development Strategy)

2. Secretary for Food and Health ("SFH") briefed members on the policy initiatives set out in the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address in relation to the policy portfolio of the Food and Health Bureau concerning agricultural and fisheries development, environmental hygiene, food safety as well as animal welfare, details of which were provided in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1530/20-21(01)).

Management of public markets

3. The Deputy Chairman considered that the Administration should expedite the construction of new public markets. SFH advised that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") was taking forward seven new market projects which were at different stages of planning. Given that it took time to build a permanent market, the Government would consider establishing temporary markets at suitable locations to serve local residents if there were genuine needs. Meanwhile, under the Market Modernization Programme, FEHD was also carrying out the preparatory and consultation work for the proposed overhaul works for some selected markets. Minor refurbishment or improvement works projects for other public markets would also be carried out in phases.

4. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan noted that Tai Wai Market had reopened in October 2020 upon completion of the retrofitting of an air-conditioning ("A/C") system. However, quite a number of the market tenants had complained that the cooling capacity of the A/C system was limited and insufficient and hence, the system broke down from time to time. She enquired about the remedial actions that the Administration would take to improve the functions and reliability of the A/C system.

5. Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene ("DFEH") responded that FEHD had been monitoring the operation of Tai Wai Market closely since its re-opening. According to the record of the Architectural Services Department ("ArchSD"), the AC supply had been temporarily suspended on three occasions

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since the re-opening of the market. Two of the occasions were caused by malfunction of individual components. The other occasion took place on the day of fire services system testing of the residential premises located above the market. It was believed that the A/C system of the market was turned off erroneously during the test of the fire services system of the residential premises and hence affecting the A/C supply in the market. In response to tenants' views reflected to FEHD concerning insufficient AC supply, FEHD had requested the contractor to conduct a comprehensive inspection of the system and adjust the air volume. Also, ArchSD would carry out improvement works to install double air curtains at four entrances in the market and adjust the height of the entrances to block hot air from the outside.

Issues relating to environmental hygiene

Rodent control

6. Mr KWOK Wai-keung said that he had received complaints from members of the public about the worsening rodent infestation problems in residential areas in various districts (e.g. in some buildings in the vicinity of the State Theatre in North Point). He considered it necessary for the Administration to implement more effective rodent prevention and control measures.

7. DFEH stressed that FEHD would continue to adopt multi-pronged strategies to combat the rodent problem in the territory, which included stepping up anti-rodent operations, enhancing environmental hygiene and strengthening law enforcement after publicity and education. Apart from the routine anti-rodent work, a total of four rounds of territory-wide anti-rodent campaigns and anti-rodent operations in designated target areas (each lasted for about 8 to 10 weeks) would be carried out by FEHD each year. Relevant departments would remain vigilant and work together to implement effective rodent prevention and control measures at the venues under their purview. For instance, the Housing Department and FEHD had set up a Working Group co-chaired by their Deputy Directors in December 2020 to formulate and implement a number of rodent prevention and control measures in public rental housing estates as detailed in paragraph 11 of the Administration's paper. DFEH added that FEHD had also made use of thermal cameras to detect rodent activities and to plan targeted operations. Data captured by thermal cameras could also quantify and assess the effectiveness of anti-rodent operations by comparing the rodent activities before and after carrying out anti-rodent work. In the last round of anti-rodent operations carried out in designated target areas, the rodent infestation rates before and after the operations had reduced by over 60% in some locations.

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Management of public toilets

8. Mr Michael TIEN expressed appreciation for the efforts made by FEHD in recent years to refurbish public toilets and to explore the use of technologies in improving the hygiene levels and service standards of public toilets. He, however, expressed concern that sometimes FEHD and relevant departments took a long time to complete repair works for public toilet facilities (e.g. spending two to three weeks to fix the flushing water supply system of Heung Che Street Public Toilet in Tsuen Wan). Mr TIEN suggested that if performance pledges had been set for completing repair works for public toilets, FEHD should put up a notice in the public toilet under repair informing users of the pledge(s) and the target date(s) of completion of repair works. A hotline might also be set up for handling enquiries about works delay.

9. SFH responded that Mr Michael TIEN's suggestion was noted. FEHD would take forward refurbishment or facelifting projects for public toilets in phases. DFEH added that to enhance the efficiency of repair works in public toilets, FEHD, ArchSD and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department ("EMSD") had jointly developed a "minor works order record system" mobile application ("mobile app") through which FEHD could make repair requests to ArchSD and EMSD and keep track of the progress of repair works. FEHD had extended the use of the mobile app to all districts since March 2020. As at July 2021, FEHD had made about 18 000 and 6 500 repair requests for public toilets respectively to ArchSD and EMSD via the system, of which 95% and 98% were made on the same day or the next day the facility damage was found. ArchSD completed the repair works of 99.9% of the repair requests it received within the ranges of the target completion dates, while EMSD completed the repair works of 97% of the repair requests within three days. FEHD would actively explore the use of technologies to improve hygiene in public toilets and enhance service quality.

Agricultural and fisheries development

10. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung expressed concern that the procedures for applying financial support under the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund and the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund were cumbersome; and, according to his understanding, many farmers and fishermen had encountered difficulties in preparing proposals and filing applications for the funds. SFH responded that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") would help the agricultural and fisheries sectors to adopt advanced technology and make use of the funds to support projects which were conducive to the sustainable development of the industry. AFCD would monitor the operation of the funds and roll out suitable measures to improve their efficiency.

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11. The Chairman and Mr LEUNG Che-cheung noted that to facilitate the making of the Northern Metropolis as proposed in the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address, private wetlands and fish ponds in areas around Tsim Bei Tsui, Nam Sang Wai, Fung Lok Wai, Tai Sang Wai, Sam Po Shue, Hoo Hok Wai and Sha Ling/Nam Hang were proposed to be resumed for more effective management and uses. Upon resumption, the private wetlands and fish ponds and the adjoining government land would be designated as multi-functional Wetland Conservation Parks. They expressed concern that the resumption of fish ponds and private land in the northern part of the New Territories might affect the livelihood of fishermen and people operating small businesses or factories there.

12. SFH responded that while the Environment Bureau would oversee the relevant policies and actual operations, AFCD would maintain close liaison with fishermen to understand their needs and explore options for the sustainable development of the fisheries industry with relevant departments. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation ("DAFC") said that when being consulted on the conservation plans in relation to the development of the Northern Metropolis, AFCD had expressed the view that fishermen should be provided with opportunities and support to switch to and develop sustainable operations after the resumption of fish ponds and wetlands. AFCD would maintain close contact with the fisheries industry on the matter. At present, many of the fish ponds were privately owned and they would be resumed by the Government for more effective management. The Government would formulate a comprehensive development plan for fish ponds and wetlands and explore options for sustainable operations. The management mode of the Agricultural Park ("Agri-Park") could be a reference. Due consideration could be given to providing a longer-term tenancy for the renting of fish ponds to encourage fishermen to make investments.

13. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan said that many farmers and fishermen had expressed worries about the impact of the redevelopment plans in the northern part of the New Territories on their business operations. In her view, farmers and fishermen who had difficulties in switching to other sustainable operations should be allowed to continue traditional agricultural and fish farming activities. On the other hand, the Administration should provide incentives to encourage more people, in particular the younger generation, to join the agricultural and fisheries industries and seize the opportunities brought about by new development plans, including participation in and co-operation with the Mainland in the development of deep-sea mariculture in the Greater Bay Area. SFH responded that AFCD would continue to support the sustainable development of the agricultural and fisheries industries and help the sectors seize new opportunities.

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14. The Chairman opined that the existing agriculture and fisheries policies failed to keep up with the time. While expressing support for the making of the Northern Metropolis, he expressed worries that some landlords might terminate the tenancy and force tenants to move out after the Administration's announcement of the land resumption plans so as to obtain higher compensation. Affected farmers, fishermen and operators of livestock farms would have to look for other suitable farmlands/sites to continue operating with the possibility of not getting any compensation or ex-gratia allowance. The Chairman considered that AFCD should consider (a) putting in place a registration scheme under the Development Bureau for affected farmers, fishermen and livestock farm operators to register for compensation/ex-gratia allowance well before the land resumption took place; (b) providing assistance to farmers, fishermen and livestock farm operators in resuming operation; and (c) offering financial support to them through existing loan funds.

15. The Chairman further asked whether the Administration would consider designating part of Phase 2 of the Agri-Park for the development of the livestock industry or the relocation of livestock farms which were affected by redevelopment projects. He suggested that the Administration should consider increasing the rearing capacity of livestock farms to increase local supply.

16. DAFC responded that AFCD was exploring with the livestock industry new initiatives (e.g. constructing multi-storey buildings for livestock keeping) to assist farmers in reprovisioning their livestock farms affected by redevelopment projects as well as enhancing the biosecurity and waste treatment facilities of livestock farms. The Agri-Park was intended for admitting farmers engaging in crop farming on a commercial basis. Farmers affected by redevelopment projects within the same timeframe would be accorded priority to apply for renting farmland in the Agri-Park. The Administration had to study whether it was feasible to accommodate livestock farms in Phase 2 of the Agri-Park which was still under planning.

Issues relating to management of animals

Nuisance caused by wild pigs

17. The Chairman, Mr Tommy CHEUNG, Mr KWOK Wai-keung, Ms Elizabeth QUAT and Ms YUNG Hoi-yan expressed concern about the frequent appearance of wild pigs in urban areas and farms in recent years, causing nuisance, environmental hygiene problems and posing threats to life and property upon their intrusion into residential areas and farms. They enquired about the measures to be taken by AFCD to tackle the various problems caused by wild pigs. Ms YUNG considered that AFCD should provide advice to the public on how they should react when they encountered wild pigs.

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18. DAFC advised that under the Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme of Wild Pigs launched in late 2017, AFCD had relocated nuisance-causing wild pigs to remote countryside areas far away from residential areas to provide immediate relief to the public from the nuisance. To control the number of wild pigs, AFCD had vaccinated or sterilized wild pigs caught when conditions permitted. In light of the intensified nuisance caused by wild pigs in urban areas in the past few years, AFCD had reviewed the existing strategies for managing wild pigs. To safeguard public safety, AFCD was in the process of evaluating whether it was necessary to capture and euthanize wild pigs which were accustomed to wandering in urban areas or foraging at public/residential areas. AFCD would consult relevant advisory bodies and animal welfare groups before implementing the new measure. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that AFCD should also consult relevant District Councils and local residents on the proposed way forward for tackling wild pig nuisance.

19. DAFC added that to follow up on a case where a wild pig was found to have infected with African Swine Fever, AFCD had inspected some 40 pig farms and advised farm owners to take precaution measures against intrusion by wild pigs. If necessary, AFCD might capture and humanely put down wild pigs which intruded into pig farms.

20. Mr KWOK Wai-keung considered that AFCD should step up efforts to control the population of wild pigs in Hong Kong. He asked whether AFCD had assessed the impact of a growing number of wild pigs on the ecological environment. DAFC responded that AFCD had not conducted such a study. Through the implementation of various measures under the management plan for wild pigs since 2017, AFCD had resolved or temporarily resolved the nuisance problems at about 60% of the 92 wild pig nuisance black spots. AFCD would continue to follow up with the remaining black spots. According to AFCD's investigation, the increase in the nuisance cases caused by wild pigs in recent years was largely due to intentional feeding and improper disposal of outdoor garbage. AFCD had been organizing educational activities to promote to the public the message of no-feeding of wild animals.

21. The Chairman suggested that the Administration should consider stepping up prosecution actions against illegal feeding of wild animals and increasing the relevant penalties to enhance deterrent effect. DAFC responded that the Administration would consider this suggestion.

22. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired about the follow-up actions taken by AFCD in response to a recent incident where an old woman was attacked by a wild pig at Baker Road and, as a result, got serious injuries. DAFC said that the dedicated team set up in AFCD for the management of wild pigs had been

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searching for the wild pig involved in the incident. The wild pig would be euthanized should it be found in accordance with the current guidelines.

Enhancing animal welfare

23. Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired when the Administration would introduce legislative amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) to enhance animal welfare. She expressed concern whether "mercy release" would be regulated under the amendment bill.

24. SFH responded that the Administration was expediting the drafting of the legislative amendments, and planned to brief the Panel on the proposed amendments in the first half of 2022. DAFC advised that the Administration would take forward, among others, the proposal to specify that the release of an animal into an unsuitable environment, causing the animal to suffer, was an act of cruelty to animals.

Burial policy

25. The Deputy Chairman expressed concern that there was only a slight increase in the percentage share of green burial cases in the total number of deaths in recent years. He suggested that the Administration should improve the design of the dedicated memorial website (www.memorial.gov.hk) to facilitate users to create personalized memorial webpages for their lost loved ones. The memorial website should offer a wide choice of design layouts and templates with different themes.

26. SFH responded that as at August 2021, the number of green burial cases accounted for 15.7% of the total number of deaths in the relevant year. The Administration would continue to provide green burial facilities, upgrade the quality and efficiency of green burial services and step up publicity efforts to encourage people to opt for green burial.

27. The Deputy Chairman noted that the Chief Executive had revealed at the press conference on the 2021 Policy Address that taking into account the development of the Northern Metropolis, the Government would shelve its plan to construct a crematorium and a funeral home at Sandy Ridge Cemetery to minimize the environmental impacts on the surrounding areas. He welcomed the decision and asked whether the Administration had identified another site for building the relevant facilities.

28. SFH affirmed that the Government would only proceed with the construction of a columbarium with about 200 000 niches at Sandy Ridge Cemetery. FEHD would explore the feasibility of providing the crematorium and relevant facilities at other locations.

III. Any other business

Report to the Council on the work of the Panel

29. As this meeting was the last meeting of the Panel in the 2020-2021 legislative session as well as in the Sixth Legislative Council ("LegCo"), the Chairman took the opportunity to thank Panel members, the Administration and the LegCo Secretariat for their support and contribution to the work of the Panel. He would make a report on the work of the Panel in the 2020-2021 legislative session accordingly.

30. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:45 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 November 2021