

The Administration's Views on the Proposed Name of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

On the basis of a submission made by the Hong Kong Public Health Inspectors' Association (PHIA), the Bills Committee on the Provision of Municipal Services (Reorganization) Bill resolved on 29 October to put up CSAs to change the name in English of the proposed "Food and Environmental Hygiene Department" to "Food and Environmental Health Department". We request Members to reconsider the proposal as the revised name does not accurately reflect the department's functions and would cause confusion particularly amongst the English-speaking sector of the community and international authorities and organisations.

Argument

2. It appears that the PHIA's main concern over the name "Food and Environmental Hygiene Department" is that it would lower the status of the Health Inspector grade and would be "self-dwarfing and retrograding of the SAR among the world's environmental health authorities". Such a worry is **unfounded**. No overseas authority would form a view on the performance of the Hong Kong SAR or indeed the Health Inspector grade on the basis of the name of a government department. The fact that we do not currently have an "Environmental Health Department" has not prevented us and the PHIA from establishing links with relevant overseas authorities and organisations.

3. We have decided to adopt the name "Food and Environmental Hygiene Department" and not "Food and Environmental Health Department" for the following reasons :

- (a) the term "environmental health" encompasses a much broader range of functions, many of which go beyond the responsibility of the new department. The discipline of environmental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as "the practice of controlling all those factors in the physical environment that exercise, or may exercise, a deleterious effect on physical development, health or survival". The term "environmental health"

as commonly used by other governments and academic/research institutions covers issues such as food safety, environmental protection, waste disposal, sewage management, control of communicable diseases related to the environment, radiation safety, pesticide safety and occupational safety and health. In some cases, environmental health authorities are responsible for environmental protection;

- (b) we do not want to create any confusion about the role of different government departments as a number of “environmental health” functions are and will continue to be performed by departments other than the proposed Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. While the new department will retain responsibility for the collection of domestic refuse, Environmental Protection Department is responsible for environmental protection and waste disposal; Drainage Services Department is responsible for sewage management; Department of Health is responsible for the control of communicable diseases and radiation safety; Agriculture and Fisheries Department is responsible for pesticide safety and Labour Department is responsible for occupation health and safety. The name “Food and Environmental Health Department” gives a false impression that the new department is responsible for the whole range of environmental health functions, which is simply not true;
- (c) the term “Food and Environmental Hygiene” more **accurately** reflects the work of the new department. “Environmental hygiene” is not confined to “sanitation and cleanliness” as some may be led to think. The term “food hygiene” is defined in the World Health Organisation’s *“Guidelines for strengthening a National Food Safety Programme”* as “all conditions and measures necessary to ensure the safety and suitability of food at all stages of the food chain” which is precisely the responsibility of the new department; and
- (d) the status of a particular grade is determined by the quality, competence and professionalism of its members, not by the name of the department in which it works.

Conclusion

4. The Administration is fully committed to the promotion and protection of environmental health. A number of government departments are dedicated to this objective. Achieving this objective requires a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach and the dedicated effort of many departments and professions, and the community as a whole. Attributing the role to one department and one grade alone does not do justice to the many other departments and to the concerted effort that is required for the success of our environmental health programmes.

5. The naming of a government department relates to the operation of government. The Bills Committee should therefore give full consideration to the Administration's view on the naming of the new department.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau
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