

(Translation)

**Speaking Note of the Secretary for the Environment and Food
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
to Examine the Draft Estimates of Expenditure in 2000-2001
to be held on 22 March 2000 at 4:50pm to 6:20pm**

Madam President,

Today, I would like to present to the Finance Committee the first budget of the Environment and Food Bureau. This Bureau is responsible for formulating and coordinating policies and programmes relating to food supply and food safety, environmental hygiene, environmental protection and conservation. Eight different government departments are involved in implementing these policies and programmes.

Due to time constraint, I will only give a broad outline of major targets for the coming financial year.

Food Supply and Food Safety

One of the major responsibilities of this Bureau is to formulate and review the policy concerning food supply and food safety. Our aim is to ensure that the supply of food is sufficient and that food available on the market is harmless to the human body. In the coming financial year, we will strengthen efforts in conducting risk assessment on high-risk food items, the safety of which is of concern to the public. We will also strengthen the food surveillance programme and enhance its openness and transparency.

Over the past year, genetically modified food has aroused public concern. In the coming financial year, we will therefore review the latest international trends in dealing with genetically modified food and consider the feasibility of establishing a labelling system for this category of food.

Environmental Hygiene

Next, I would like to talk about our work in environmental hygiene. Our aim is to ensure a high standard of environmental hygiene in all parts of the territory. In the coming financial year, we will strengthen enforcement action against unlicensed food premises and improper food handling. We will review the system for licensing food premises with a view to streamlining and expediting the licensing process. We will again improve the efficiency in handling complaints relating to environmental hygiene.

As the work of the District Councils is closely associated with the livelihood of residents in the district, we will work closely with the District Councils. We will promote district involvement in work related to environmental hygiene. We will also endeavour to rally the strength of the community to work for a cleaner Hong Kong.

Environmental Protection and Conservation

Our aim for this policy area is to improve Hong Kong's environment, conserve our natural heritage and reduce pollution and waste.

With regard to environmental protection, we will take more active steps in coordinating waste reduction measures and in formulating new waste management plans. We will conduct a study on how to integrate material recovery and recycling in the waste management system. In addition, we will enhance public awareness of waste reduction, separation and recovery through different promotional activities.

We will increase our cooperation with the Guangdong authorities in dealing with environmental issues of mutual concern. We hope that the "Hong Kong Guangdong Joint Working Group on Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection" will convene its first meeting shortly to continue cooperation in six areas, which include studying the air and water quality of the Pearl River Delta Region, exploring the feasibility of harmonizing motor diesel fuel specifications between the two places and formulate a concrete action plan to achieve such harmonization, and the enhancement of cooperation and liaison with each other in the area of urban planning and development.

In the area of conservation, we will formulate a comprehensive policy on conservation. Our objective is to conserve and improve the natural environment to sustain public enjoyment and to preserve scientific research and educational value of our natural environment. We will look into various options on how to achieve these objectives and will consult the public on our proposed policy.

With the support of our Honourable Members, I hope that our policy proposals will be successfully implemented.

Madam President, should Honourable Members have any questions, my colleagues and I will be most willing to answer them. Thank you.