

Role-play on Mock Question Time
Daya Bay Contingency Plan
Sample oral question in Council meeting

Official Record of Proceedings

Meeting date: 28 June 2023

Question 3: Measures to cope with the discharge of nuclear wastewater by the Japanese Government

MS JOEPHY CHAN (in Cantonese): *President, it has been reported that the Embassy of Japan in China earlier held a briefing session in Beijing on the discharge of nuclear wastewater generated by the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, but it did not invite the Chinese media to attend the session, and even disseminated false information at the session in an attempt to mislead the international community. Also, it did not follow the principle of goodwill consultation to explore other options to dispose of the nuclear wastewater. There are views that the Government should formulate the most stringent precautionary measures in response to the discharge plan. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) whether it has assessed the immediate impact and level of risks posed by the discharge plan to food safety and public health in Hong Kong, and of the measures in place to enhance the public's understanding of the plan and its risks to their own health;*
- (2) apart from aquatic products, whether the Government will impose import control on processed food (regardless of their places of origin) made from fresh food from Fukushima and its neighbouring areas, expand the scope of radiological testing on imported Japanese food products, and require all processed food imported from Japan to be accompanied by radiation certificates and pass the relevant tests; and*
- (3) whether the authorities will, in addition to drawing reference from the reports published by the International Atomic Energy Agency on the discharge plan, draw reference from other representative international research and assessment reports to help them formulate more comprehensive corresponding measures; if so, of the titles of such reports, as well as the details of the corresponding measures (including the additional manpower and total expenditure involved); if not, the reasons for that? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): President, the Government of Japan plans to discharge the wastewater generated in the process of cooling the reactors at the Fukushima nuclear power station ("FNPS") into the ocean after treatment in the summer of 2023. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR") Government has repeatedly expressed grave concern about the impact of the discharge plan on food safety, and has indicated clearly to the Japanese authorities that

they should not discharge the wastewater from FNPS into the ocean unilaterally without the consensus of the international community so as to avoid bringing about irreversible impacts on the environment.

Food safety is an issue of paramount importance affecting public health. The Government is responsible for ensuring that food sold in Hong Kong is safe and fit for consumption. Since issues such as pollution to the ocean are international issues in the realm of foreign affairs, the Environment and Ecology Bureau (“EEB”) has, after the announcement of the discharge plan of Japan, relayed the opinions and concerns of various sectors to the Office of the Commissioner of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (“OCMFA”) in Hong Kong, and maintained liaison with OCMFA. EEB and relevant departments are fully prepared in response to the discharge plan, and our primary concern is to safeguard food safety and public health in Hong Kong.

A consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by Ms Joephy CHAN is provided as follows:

- (1) At present, the International Atomic Energy Agency (“IAEA”) Task Force is still examining whether the discharge plan meets the safety standards of IAEA, and whether it would have negative impact on human health and the ecosystem. The relevant concluding report has yet been published. According to the current information and assessment, food products that have higher risks of being affected by the discharge plan are mainly aquatic products from Fukushima and its nearby coastal prefectures. In response to the discharge plan of Japan, I have published an article in the newspaper and attended media interviews to explain the discharge plan and the relevant health risks to members of the public with the view to enhancing their understanding. Such efforts have already drawn the attention of the community. To provide more comprehensive information to the public, the Centre for Food Safety (“CFS”) is releasing on its website relevant information and results of the radiological tests on imported Japanese food products, while the Department of Health is providing on its website information on the health effects of radiation and frequently asked questions with answers for public perusal. Once Japan commences the discharge, CFS will step up the dissemination of information by releasing results of the radiological tests on its website on each working day and issue press release on a regular basis. We will also set up a one-stop web page in the EEB website with the view to fostering better understanding of the public on the latest information on the safety of imported Japanese food.
- (2) According to the current information and assessment, our preliminary plan is to put all fresh, chilled, frozen and dried aquatic products, seaweed and sea salt from the affected prefectures, under the scope of our tightened import control measures. As for other highly processed food containing aquatic products, generally speaking, the radionuclides on the surface of the ingredient will be removed during the preparation and the concentration of the concerned ingredient will also be diluted after addition of other ingredients. According to IAEA, general cooking and food processing procedures can lower the radioactivity of food effectively. Having said that, the HKSAR Government

will enhance the testing arrangement, including test on relevant processed food of aquatic product, with the view to providing dual protection and ensuring food safety. As for Japanese food products which are still allowed to be imported, enhanced testing will still be applied even when such food products are accompanied by radiation certificates, so as to achieve dual insurance. Since mid-April, CFS has gradually stepped up radiological tests on imported Japanese food products, especially those on aquatic products and specified radionuclides. Since mid-June, CFS has also expanded the scope of testing to cover all Japanese aquatic products (irrespective of prefectures), and stepped up radiological tests on other processed food imported from Japan.

- (3) If the Japanese authorities proceed with the discharge of wastewater as planned, it will last for 30 years. We are highly concerned about how they will ensure that the treatment facility maintains effective operation throughout, and that the discharge plan poses no potential risks to food safety and the marine ecosystem. Safeguarding food safety and public health in Hong Kong is the primary concern of the HKSAR Government. Once the discharge has commenced, the HKSAR Government will immediately take stringent import control measures, including prohibiting the import of aquatic products from the highest-risk coastal prefectures in proximity to Fukushima, and imposing stringent import control on aquatic products from other prefectures which are at risk by denying entry of these products into Hong Kong unless they are accompanied by radiation certificates. As for the details of the proposed measures, including the prefectures to be covered, apart from the conclusion of the final report of IAEA, the opinions of the Mainland experts, the practices and assessments of the Mainland and neighbouring regions, relevant information provided by Japan on the issue and other relevant information available in the international community will be taken into full consideration before a decision is made.

Apart from stepping up import control measures, the Government has also enhanced testing arrangement to provide dual protection. The additional expenditure incurred by the Government for procuring necessary testing equipment over these two years is around \$6 million per year, and the additional expenditure on manpower, equipment maintenance, testing consumables and related matters will be around \$3.8 million per year.

MS JOEPHY CHAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. As pointed out in the Secretary's reply, Japan has already "robbed" us prior to the discharge of nuclear wastewater. In these two years before they commence the discharge of nuclear wastewater, we have already spent an additional expenditure of \$10 million per year. The damage caused by Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater will last for at least 30 years. By doing some calculation, it will cost our taxpayers at least \$300 million, whereas inflation has yet to be taken into account. Besides, this sum of expenditure is only spent on testing, it has not taken into account the notification mechanism to be set up or if we request to expand the scope of testing. According to publicly available data, Hong Kong is currently the second largest export destination for Japanese food products, having imported food products worth \$12 billion in 2022. We have certain bargaining*

power, and should stand at the forefront to act as a gatekeeper for the public. Yet, the Government's response has not demonstrated such a firm stance.

President, what I would like to ask in follow-up is, the Mainland has prohibited the import of food and aquatic products from 10 regions such as Fukushima and Tokyo, and the Macao Special Administrative Region has also announced a ban on nine regions. But then, HKSAR would only impose a ban on five prefectures, which is relatively light-handed. My question is, will the SAR Government tighten the relevant regulations in accordance with our country's "safety first" approach? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): President, we have currently imposed regulatory control on food products from five prefectures in Japan. Nevertheless, the control measures are not imposed on aquatic products, but on such products as vegetables, dairy products, eggs, meat and fresh meat. As such, the five prefectures that we are now talking about are in response to the radiation leak caused by the Fukushima incident back then (i.e. 2011), which has affected the agricultural products on land. We have put in place these measures in response to that incident.

This time around, if Japan is to discharge the wastewater, we believe it will mainly affect aquatic products, hence we have not yet specified the scope of regulatory control. As I have indicated just now, we would prohibit the import from the highest-risk prefectures. As for those prefectures with a lower risk, we will require that the food products should be accompanied by radiation certificates. We will also conduct re-examination after the products are imported into Hong Kong, for the sake of confirming their safety before they can be sold in the market. Yet, regarding the specific scope, we are waiting for IAEA's final assessment report and the final assessment opinions of our country's experts. By then, it will also be necessary to see if more required information is available for specifying the scope of regulatory control. Therefore, the existing five prefectures would not necessarily be the five prefectures on which we will impose regulatory control in the future.

MS CHAN HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Secretary has given his response on this topic on many occasions at the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, and we can see that the SAR Government has adopted an increasingly tough stance. Yet, the discharge of nuclear wastewater will exert irreversible damage on the environment, and it will also cause long-lasting harm to the human body. If Japan really thinks that there is no problem with the wastewater, it can keep it in its own territory and does not need to discharge it. Its discharge of wastewater is a selfish act, which has completely disregarded the views of the entire world. Therefore, I wish to point out that, Secretary, the kinder we are to Japan, the more presumptuous it will be.*

I just want to ask, we have incurred an additional expenditure of \$6 million for procuring necessary testing equipment, and \$3.8 million on manpower, equipment maintenance and consumables in the past two years. Why does the SAR Government spend perhaps over \$10 million per year to condone such a presumptuous act of Japan? Will Japan pay this bill for us? Can we simply be tougher, "shut the door" right now

and stop wasting so much public money on testing? Can we use such public money to help our restaurants or other fishermen instead? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): President, I thank the Member for her supplementary question and views. I would like to talk about two aspects. First, we as the Government, CFS has the responsibility to protect the safety of all food sold in Hong Kong, including the radiation levels. Therefore, in terms of radiological testing, we have of course conducted more testing on various aspects because of Japan. Nevertheless, we do not look at Japanese products only, but we also conduct testing having regard to the radiation background of other food products. Therefore, we need a system, as well as the necessary equipment and our experts to ensure food safety from various aspects. The Fukushima incident in Japan is not the sole reason.

On the other hand, I believe we have made our stance very clear regarding Japan's plan to discharge wastewater this time around. The Member has asked whether we would prohibit the import of all Japanese food products across the board. I believe that regarding this matter, we think that Japan has taken an incorrect approach, so that we have to take corresponding actions. Apart from that, what specific work should we do to protect food safety and public health? I think we should act on a scientific basis. This is our foundation and what we ought to do. So, in this regard, I would like to point out here that we will look at IAEA's assessment findings, the final opinions of our country's experts and the actual affected areas according to our assessment before making a final decision on the regulatory control.

But if there is such a need, let me reiterate here that we have not drawn a line on the necessary regulatory control. There are no reasons for me to protect the interests of Japan either. Therefore, in this regard, we definitely take the health and food safety of Hong Kong people as the principle for our final decision on the scope of regulatory control.

(Mr Steven HO indicated his intention to raise a point of order)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Steven HO, what is your point of order?

MR STEVEN HO (in Cantonese): *Just now Ms CHAN Hoi-yan has asked the Secretary whether the public money spent on testing will be saved and used to help the local industries. The Secretary has not answered her question.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This is not the supplementary question you have raised.

MR STEVEN HO (in Cantonese): *The Secretary should clarify this.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Steven HO, you can raise a supplementary question on this later.

Mr CHAN Hak-kan, please raise your supplementary question.

MR CHAN HAK-KAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, our country, the European Union and the United Kingdom have required food products from Japan's 47 prefectures to be labelled with their places of origin long ago. Apart from stepping up random testing and imposing partial restriction on the import of these Japanese food products, will the SAR Government require that these imported food products from Japan be labelled with their places of origin as well? This will enable the consumers and members of the public to know where the products that they buy come from, thereby enhancing our right to know, so that we can choose these Japanese food products cautiously.*

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): I thank the Member for his views. We are considering different approaches, and studying how we can enhance the protection for the public regarding food safety on the one hand, while on the other hand, enabling members of the public to obtain more information and knowledge for them to make choices. Therefore, we will take into account the suggestions made by Members. In fact, we have already asked our colleagues to conduct a study and make preparation in this respect.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): *President, Japan has failed to explain that the nuclear-contaminated water is safe after all. If it is safe, why does Japan not keep it for themselves, but discharge it into the sea? Obviously, the discharge of wastewater into the sea is a shameful act of "mutual destruction" with all mankind. It has been reported that Japan is determined to go its own way on discharging nuclear-contaminated water into the sea, and it will conduct a final review today—reportedly on 28 June. Therefore, I think the Government's attitude in this regard is not tough enough, and it must address this issue decisively. On the other hand, we have also noticed that the so-called "green groups" have never spoken up on this matter since the very beginning. They are indeed suffering from aphasia. Is it necessary for the Government to put pressure on these "pseudo-green groups" such that they would do something? Public health reasons would constitute solid justification for the Government to take more decisive and effective measures to prohibit Japanese food products from entering Hong Kong. Only by decisively prohibiting the import of all Japanese food products can we put sufficient pressure on Japan. Given so, can the Government get tough?*

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): President, as I have mentioned in the main reply, the Government's stance has all along been very clear. We have also repeatedly expressed to the Government of Japan our concerns and that we oppose Japan's plan to discharge wastewater. We have also indicated clearly to the Government of Japan and the Consul-General of Japan in Hong Kong that we would definitely take corresponding actions if Japan is to discharge the wastewater. Therefore, our stance in this regard is clear and decisive. I have also taken the initiative to publish an article to explain to members of the public as well as explaining through different media on various occasions why the discharge of wastewater is an important issue for public health and food safety.

Therefore, our stance in this regard is never unclear or weak. I believe what we are talking about is how far and how deep we should go in terms of the scope of regulatory control at that time. I have explained this multiple times. Since we are

talking about the issue of food safety, as well as the issue of the impact and risks on the environment, we should deal with it by adopting a scientific approach. As such, we are waiting for their final report, and we are also waiting for the assessment report of our country's experts before making a decision on this matter. We believe that this is a scientific and responsible behaviour.

MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Earlier on, a Member raised a question on the impact of the Government of Japan's discharge of nuclear wastewater on the safety of imported Japanese food products. Back then, the Bureau indicated in its reply that import control on aquatic products from related regions of Japan might have to be tightened. I wish to point out that measures such as stringent testing on aquatic and food products imported from Japan, and imposing import control do help to boost public confidence. Yet, they may also increase the cost of imports, which may cause upward pressure on prices. May I ask the Bureau whether it has discussed, studied and encouraged the industries to adjust their sources of imports, and switch to introduce high-quality and safe foodstuff from other countries and regions? This can ensure food safety and balance the price level, so as to prevent the business of the industries from being affected by the nuclear wastewater incident. Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): My thanks go to Mr HO for his supplementary question. Mr HO has pointed out that apart from food safety, the import of Japanese food products into Hong Kong is also related to certain industries in Hong Kong, or our economy, which we should take into account as well. Therefore, in this regard, we have met with the catering industry many times. On the one hand, we have explained to them the risks of the discharge of wastewater by Japan and why we need to take actions to protect the food safety in Hong Kong. On the other hand, we have also expressed clearly to them that they should consider the needs of their respective industry, and order goods from other places or sources that they consider reliable. Besides, they should also take these risks into account when making arrangements for their business operations in the future. Nevertheless, we have communicated and met with the industries multiple times. We will continue to communicate with them in the future to keep them informed of the latest developments in the entire matter, so that they can make better deployment and arrangements. Thank you, President.