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Legislative Council

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LC Paper No. CB(2) 3270/03-04
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 29 June 2004 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP (Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok, JP

Member attending : Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members absent : Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung

Public officers attending : Item IV

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Food & Environmental Hygiene)

Mr Vincent LIU
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Food & Environmental Hygiene) 2
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr CHOW Kwok-leung
Chief Assistant Secretary (Works)
Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

Mr LAU Sin-pang
Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Dr Howard WONG
Senior Veterinary Officer (Livestock Farm)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Y Y HO
Consultant (Community Medicine)
(Risk Assessment and Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Ms Rhonda LO
Assistant Director (Operations) 3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr Thomas TSANG
Consultant, Community Medicine
(Communicable Disease)
Department of Health

Mr Patrick LI
Assistant Director (2)
Home Affairs Department

Mr LAI Ip-cheung
Assistant Director (Estate Management) 1
Housing Department

Mr James HOR
Assistant Director (Estate Management) (Lands Administration
Office/Headquarters)
Lands Department

Item V

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Vincent LIU
Principal Assistant Secretary
(Food & Environmental Hygiene) 2
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Ms Annette LEE

Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr KO Chun-keung
Assistant Director (Operations) 1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Item VI

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Ms Vivian KO
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Ms Annette LEE
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Ms Rhonda LO
Assistant Director (Operations) 3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Ms Ada Y L LAW
Statistician
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Item VII

Mr Eddy CHAN
Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Ms Vivian KO
Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) 1
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Dr Y Y HO
Consultant (Community Medicine)
(Risk Assessment and Communication)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in attendance : Ms Amy WONG
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

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I. Confirmation of minutes of meetings

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 2947/03-04, CB(2) 2777/03-04, CB(2)2812/03-04 and CB(2) 2949/03-04]

The minutes of the special meetings held on 16 February and 2 April 2004 and the regular meetings held on 27 April 2004 and 25 May 2004 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 2930/03-04(01) and (02)]

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items, as proposed by the Administration, at the next regular meeting scheduled for 13 July 2004 at 10:45 am -

- (a) Risk assessment study on Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons in barbecue meat; and
- (b) Measures to prevent ciguatera poisoning cases.

3. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked about the progress of the proposed demerit points system for food premises. Deputy Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene) (DS(FEH)) responded that the proposal was under review, and the Administration would revert to the Panel in the new legislative session before implementation of the scheme.

III Information paper(s) issued since last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2596/03-04(01)]

4. Members noted that, as requested at the meeting on 25 November 2003, the Administration had provided information on the location of the 100 aqua privies to be converted into flushing toilets.

IV Anti-mosquito efforts and dengue fever surveillance

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2930/03-04(03)]

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5. Principal Assistant Secretary (Food & Environmental Hygiene)2 (PAS(FEH)2) took members through the Administration's paper on measures taken by relevant departments to guard against mosquito-borne diseases in the light of the recent rise in ovitrap indices in the territory. PAS(FEH)2 said that to ensure that sufficient funding was available to carry out anti-mosquito operations, an "Anti-mosquito Support Scheme" with an initial fund of \$10 million would be established for the year 2004-05 to support the 18 District Task Forces in launching their anti-mosquito programmes. The Scheme would also support anti-mosquito operations on those grey areas which took time to ascertain the management authority or the jurisdiction. PAS(FEH)2 further said that in addition to efforts made by the Government to tackle the mosquito problem, community involvement was indispensable. Apart from eliminating potential mosquito breeding grounds in their premises and neighbourhood, members of the public could use the telephone hotline 2868 0000, or the Housing Department hotline 2712 2712, to report mosquito problems.

6. PAS(FEH)2 added that following the recent Japanese Encephalitis (JE) case at Palm Springs in Yuen Long, the Yuen Long District Anti-Mosquito Task Force had co-ordinated the efforts of relevant government departments in carrying out a large-scale anti-mosquito campaign in the district, which included removing stagnant water, placing mosquito trapping devices at blackspots, grass-cutting, and distributing leaflets on the prevention of mosquito and JE. The Department of Health would also organise talks on mosquito prevention and hygiene matters for residents in the district.

Mai Po Nature Reserve

7. In reply to Mr LEUNG Fu-wah, Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DD/AFC) said that World Wide Fund Hong Kong had been advised to step up the removal of open containers at the Mai Po Nature Reserve to eliminate potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

Manpower deployment

8. Mr Andrew CHENG commented that the surge in ovitrap indices in some areas such as Tai Wai was related to the mass construction works of T3 Highway. He expressed concern that there might not be sufficient staff to deal with anti-mosquito work. He asked whether Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) could deploy staff from the hawker control or pest control teams to carry out anti-mosquito work in high-risk areas whenever it was necessary.

9. Assistant Director (Operations)3 of FEHD (AD(O)3) said that there would be about 1 300 staff members, including the 500 extra workers to be hired in summer, for anti-mosquito work. Some of these staff members would carry out clearing-up work in potential mosquito breeding sites, while others would carry out enforcement duties. These staff members could be flexibly deployed to tackle mosquito problems in blackspots as and when necessary.

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10. DS(FEH) added that anti-mosquito work required long-term coordinated efforts of the relevant government departments and also community participation. However, if there was a surge in the ovitrap index, say, up to 20%, FEHD would immediately trigger off actions in conjunction with the relevant departments to clear the mosquito breeding sites in the areas concerned. Moreover, the \$10 million "Anti-mosquito Support Scheme" could provide urgent funding if extra resources were required.

11. The Chairman enquired about the duration of employment of the proposed 500 additional staff for anti-mosquito work. AD(O)3 replied that the 500 additional workers would be employed on contract basis from this summer until the end of the year.

12. Mr Andrew CHENG asked about the actual staff establishment for anti-mosquito work. He had the impression that there were more staff for hawker control than for pest control.

13. AD(O)3 explained that there was a pest control section for each district. For mosquito control, there were 79 teams comprising 205 staff members on the establishment, and there were 68 teams each comprising nine contract workers for cleaning up blackspots. These did not include the 500 additional contract workers to be employed. Apart from the regular pest control programmes, special operations were carried out a few times a year, with extra staff deployed from other sections of FEHD, to conduct inspections of old tenement buildings, village houses and other problem areas. So far, the hawker control staff had not been deployed to perform anti-mosquito work as there was already adequate manpower for the work.

14. In reply to Mr Tommy CHEUNG, AD(O)3 confirmed that for grey areas such as hillsides next to public housing estates, FEHD would carry out the anti-mosquito work first and resolve the issue of responsibility afterwards.

Private farmland and village houses

15. Referring to the high ovitrap indices in New Territories West, Mr Albert CHAN urged the Administration to tackle the mosquito problem at source such as construction sites, private farmlands, and septic tanks for village houses. He pointed out that there were about 100 000 village houses and the poor hygiene conditions of the septic tanks had been the mosquito breeding grounds for years. To guard against deterioration of the mosquito problem in densely populated areas, Mr CHAN asked whether the Administration would consider placing some mosquito-trapping devices in these areas.

16. DD/AFC said that Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had reminded farmers to remove garbage and stagnant water on farmland in order to control the mosquito problem. However, as the owner's consent was required

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for entering private properties, AFCD could only give advice to the owners on the anti-mosquito measures.

17. AD(O)3 of FEHD said that during regular inspections of village houses, FEHD staff had reminded the residents there to pay attention to any mosquito breeding in their septic tanks. PAS(FEH)2 added that village houses were one of the target areas of FEHD in the coming months, and the extra 500 contract workers to be hired would enhance the special anti-mosquito operations in this respect.

18. Assistant Director (Estate Management) 1 of Housing Department (HD) said that HD was inviting tenders for supply of mosquito-killing devices for all the five regions. Portable devices would be purchased for use in problematic areas. Mr Albert CHAN said that he hoped the tender process could be expedited, and that cheaper models should be purchased given the large number of devices required.

19. Mr Albert CHAN expressed disappointment about the lack of action in respect of private farmlands and village houses. He said that the mosquito problem in abandoned farmlands and septic tanks of village houses was very serious. He asked the Administration to provide the number of inspections conducted on private farmlands and village houses, and the number of advice given/prosecutions instituted in this respect. Mr CHAN said that he had lodged complaints to the relevant departments in the past, but no improvements had been observed so far. He considered that the departments had been negligent in their duties.

20. PAS(FEH)2 explained that while the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) provided that the owner/tenants concerned could be required to clean up unhygienic spots under their responsibility, there was difficulty in identifying the owners of private farmlands to clear mosquito breeding sites on these land. The Administration was now considering amending Cap. 132 to enable the Administration to take measures to prevent the breeding of mosquito larvae with or without issuing notice to the occupiers or owner of the premises. The Administration could recover the cost for taking such measures. Besides, the Administration would also require companies responsible for management of the premises to clear any accumulation of stagnant water which might be a breeding ground for mosquitoes and to take steps to prevent mosquito breeding. AD(O)3 said that FEHD would also follow up the mosquito problem of septic tanks in villages houses.

21. DS(FEH) supplemented that under exceptional circumstances when public health was at stake, the Administration would deal with the problem first before resolving the issue of responsibility. However, to facilitate day-to-day operation in the long term, FEHD would consider legislative amendments to empower its staff to enter private properties to remove public health hazards.

22. Mr Albert CHAN remarked that over 70% of the farmland was owned by conglomerates. He urged the Administration to discuss with these major land

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developers ways to prevent these land from becoming mosquito breeding grounds, for the protection of public health and also the safety of the residents nearby.

23. The Chairman said that there were no management companies for private farmland which had caused serious mosquito problem in the New Territories. As the mosquito problem might worsen in the wet season in July and August 2004, he urged the Administration to take immediate action to tackle the problem.

24. Mr WONG Yung-kan criticised the Government for not making sufficient efforts to tackle the mosquito problem. He doubted whether the Government had a good understanding of the seasonal characteristics of the mosquito problem, as there was a surge of ovitrap indices in many districts in May despite the regular mosquito campaigns. He urged the Administration to carry out more preventive work to guard against an outbreak of mosquito-borne diseases.

25. DS(FEH) responded that the Government had attached great importance to anti-mosquito work. The establishment of the Anti-mosquito Steering Committee (AMSC) in 2002 and the ovitrap indices were some of the efforts made to strengthen mosquito prevention and control work. AMSC had met in last winter and endorsed a three-pronged approach that included intensified preventive and enforcement actions, strengthened surveillance measures and enhanced publicity programmes. DS(FEH) considered that the sharp rise of ovitrap indices in May was due to the high rainfall which favoured accumulation of stagnant water and breeding of mosquito. He said that the Government would strengthen its anti-mosquito efforts in view of the surge in ovitrap indices recently, and would maintain vigilance throughout the year. He reiterated that community participation was essential in mosquito prevention and control work.

Monitoring of JE vector mosquito Culex

26. Mr Tommy CHEUNG enquired whether the risk of JE would be higher in areas adjacent to pig farms and whether ovitraps should also be placed near pig farms to strengthen monitoring of JE.

27. Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment and Communication) (C(CM)(RAC)) explained that as the ecological environment for the JE vector mosquito Culex and the dengue vector mosquito Aedes albopictus was different, the existing ovitraps would not be effective in monitoring the distribution of Culex mosquitoes. He said that other surveillance methods would be used for monitoring the JE vector mosquito Culex.

28. Dr LO Wing-lok said that mosquitoes were part of nature and could not be eradicated. However, Government should take effective measures to reduce the risks of transmission of mosquito-borne diseases. Dr LO suggested that Government should conduct studies on the JE vector mosquito Culex and the vulnerable areas in Hong Kong. Dr LO also made the following suggestions -

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- (a) risk assessments be conducted on dengue fever, JE and malaria which were transmitted by mosquitoes;
- (b) indices be compiled on the vector mosquitoes, i.e. Culex, Aedes albopictus and Anopheles, to facilitate assessment of their risks to human; and
- (c) the surveillance programme be extended to cover mites and fleas that could also cause disease in humans.

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29. C(CM)(RAC) responded that there were already surveillance programmes on Culex, Aedes albopictus and Anopheles mosquitoes. While the findings were currently only issued to the relevant departments for follow-up actions, he would consider releasing the information to the public as well.

30. Concerning the risk of human infection of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, Consultant (Community Medicine) (Communicable Disease) (C(CM)(CD)) of the Department of Health said that the number of dengue fever and JE cases was available on the Department's website. The Department could consider the feasibility of conducting other studies, for example, a blood sample survey on JE was being conducted, and the findings would be available in a few weeks. As regards the risk of going to country parks, more data would need to be collected for analysis.

Rear lanes and private streets

31. The Chairman said that the abandoned farmland posed a serious problem, and some hygiene blackspots such as the rear lanes and private streets had also reverted to their former unhygienic conditions. He urged the Administration not to tolerate the unsatisfactory hygiene conditions in these areas. He also pledged full support to the proposed legislative amendments to facilitate cleaning-up of and effective enforcement against environmental blackspots by relevant departments.

32. Assistant Director (2) of Home Affairs Department (AD(2)(HAD)) responded that the conditions of rear lanes and private streets had been much improved after efforts made by relevant government departments under the coordination of HAD. The operation mode followed the model recommended by the Team Clean, i.e. action would be taken by Government to clean up the environment first and expenses could be recovered from the owners concerned later. AD(2)(HAD) said that sustained efforts were required to maintain the cleanliness of rear lanes and private streets, which was ultimately the responsibility of the owners and tenants concerned.

33. As regards abandoned private land, AD(2)(HAD) said that each district had set up its own district anti-mosquito task force. Taking Hang On Estate as an example, AD(2)(HAD) said that HAD had co-ordinated closely with relevant government departments and had conducted inter-departmental operations to tackle the mosquito

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problem in the vicinity. Frontline staff had been told to give priority to the anti-mosquito work, and HAD had also launched much publicity to involve the community in the anti-mosquito activities.

V Monitoring of the supply of food by school catering contractors
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2930/03-04(04)]

Findings of the recent food poisoning incident

34. Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene) of FEHD (DD(EH)) highlighted the salient points in the Administration's paper. She said that a food factory licensee who wished to supply lunch boxes had to obtain endorsement from FEHD and comply with additional licensing requirements, including temperature requirements for storage of hot and cold meals, and keeping of records on the suppliers of food ingredients. Guidelines to schools on meal arrangements were issued by the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) based on input provided by FEHD. As regards the recent incident of food poisoning occurred at a school in Tsueng Kwan O, the laboratory results of the food samples taken supported the postulation that *Staphylococcus aureus* (SA) was the cause of the food poisoning outbreak which affected 101 students and one staff member of the school. FEHD was assessing the available evidence for instituting prosecutions against the two food factories concerned. In the meantime, one of the food factories, which was the subcontractor actually providing the lunch boxes, was prosecuted for failing to keep its food room clean.

35. DD(EH) further said that the Administration had reviewed the existing regulatory framework for monitoring the supply of meals to schools, and considered that there were already sufficient safeguards under the existing legislation to hold the food suppliers concerned liable for selling unfit food. The Administration therefore did not consider it necessary to propose any legislative amendment in this regard.

Existing regulatory control of lunch box suppliers

36. The Chairman asked whether all licensed food factories were allowed to supply lunch boxes to schools. DD(EH) advised that FEHD endorsement was necessary for a food factory to supply lunch boxes to schools, and it had to comply with additional licensing requirements. In the present case, if there was sufficient evidence to prove that unfit food was supplied, both the licensed lunch box supplier and his subcontractor would be liable to prosecution. She added that in this case, the subcontractor had breached licensing conditions for supplying lunch boxes to the school.

37. The Chairman remarked that under the existing regulatory framework, the Administration would not be able to detect that a subcontractor had been engaged by a licensee to supply lunch boxes to schools unless there was a food poisoning case.

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Suggestions on improvement measures

Detailed and practical guidelines to schools

38. Referring to the food poisoning incident, Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether it was possible that the food was contaminated during the delivery process or the food had gone bad because it was not placed under suitable temperature in the school. He suggested that FEHD should recommend to EMB that the lunch boxes should be delivered to the schools close to consumption time, and that schools should be equipped with suitable storage cabinets so that lunchboxes could be placed under the appropriate temperature prior to consumption.

39. DD(EH) said that EMB had issued detailed guidelines to schools, including advice on selection of suppliers, proper storage of meals and reducing the time gap between delivery of meals and consumption. FEHD had also issued educational pamphlets to schools in this regard. In the food poisoning case, the lunch boxes had not been placed under the required temperature during delivery and storage, and a verbal warning had been issued to the subcontractor supplying these lunch boxes.

40. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that the temperature requirements, such as that for storage of sushi, should be included in the licensing conditions and in the guidelines issued to schools. Schools should also be advised to avoid ordering high-risk food such as sushi for their students.

41. DD(EH) said that the temperature requirements for hot meals (63°C) and cold meals (4°C) were already specified in the licensing conditions and in the guidelines to schools. PAS(FEH)2 added that FEHD had requested EMB to advise the schools to avoid high-risk food for lunch boxes.

42. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed concern that schools were not equipped with proper storage cabinets. He also said that FEHD should advise schools about the risks for not placing the food under the required temperature.

Regulatory framework for food factories supplying lunch boxes

43. Referring to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper, Mr WONG Yung-kan said that the practice of issuing three written warnings in a period of six months before cancellation of licence was too lenient. He suggested that there should be faster and more effective action against breaches of licensing conditions or food safety requirements in order to safeguard public health. In this connection, the Chairman requested the Administration to explain the classification of minor and serious offences.

44. DD(EH) explained that the nature of the breaches would be taken into account. Serious offences attracted higher demerit points, while minor breaches which were not directly related to food safety and hygiene, such as alteration of layout, would attract

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fewer demerit points. He said that providing unfit food leading to food poisoning was a serious offence and could lead to suspension of licence.

Monitoring of subcontracting of meal boxes

45. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that FEHD should prohibit food factory licensees from contracting out the supply of meal boxes, and this should be explicitly stated in FEHD's endorsements. Mr WONG Yung-kan requested the Administration to clarify whether FEHD allowed subcontracting in the supply of lunch box to schools, and whether such subcontracting would need to be declared or reported to FEHD.

46. DD(EH) said that FEHD had carefully considered whether there was a need to ban food suppliers from contracting-out arrangements altogether. Given that under the existing legislation, those responsible (including the subcontractors) would be held liable for selling unfit food, FEHD was of the view that there was no need for imposing a ban on subcontracting, and that some flexibility should be allowed for contracting out of food ingredients, so as not to affect the normal operation of the food trade.

47. The Chairman said that there were 103 food factories that were allowed to supply lunch boxes to schools, and it was possible for them to engage other food suppliers without the knowledge of schools or FEHD. He considered that there were loopholes in the monitoring of these food suppliers, as the engagement of subcontractor in the present case would not have surfaced if there had not been an outbreak of food poisoning in the school.

48. DD(EH) said that in this case, both the food supplier and the subcontractor would be liable for prosecution if there was sufficient evidence to prove that the food supplied by them was unfit. She added that FEHD had a comprehensive surveillance programme to ensure the safety of food products. In 2003, more than 10 000 samples were collected from high-risk food. Schools were reminded to order meal boxes from licensed food suppliers which had obtained FEHD's endorsement for supply of meal boxes. Schools were also advised to inspect the food suppliers' licences and FEHD's endorsement, and visit their food factories.

49. Mr Tommy CHEUNG suggested that FEHD's endorsement should be required if any food supplier, including subcontractor, wanted to supply meal boxes to schools, and they had to comply with the additional licensing requirements.

50. DS(FEH) noted the concerns expressed by the Panel Chairman and members. He agreed to consider the suggestion of requiring all meal box suppliers, including subcontractors, to obtain FEHD's endorsement having regard to the legal and practical implications of the suggestion.

VI Forecasting exercise on the slaughtering throughput of livestock
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2930/03-04(05)]

51. DS(FEH) highlighted the salient points in the Administration's paper which described the background and outcome of the forecasting study on the slaughtering throughput of livestock in Hong Kong in the coming years. He said that the study showed decreasing trends of the average consumption of fresh pork and beef per person, which resulted in the decline of the daily number of pigs and cattle slaughtered in the coming few years. The findings were being examined by Architectural Services Department (ASD) for ascertaining the technical feasibility of centralizing the slaughtering operations at Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse. The Administration would consider the way forward after studying ASD's assessment and would report to the Panel in due course.

52. The Chairman asked whether the decreasing number of pigs and cattle slaughtered was caused by the rising consumption of chilled pork and frozen food.

53. DD(EH) said that the decrease in the number of pigs and cattle slaughtered could be caused by several factors such as price, improvement in the rearing of livestock which increased the proportion of meat in pig/cattle, availability of other food choices and slaughtering of more large pigs than medium and small pigs.

54. Mr Tommy CHEUNG asked whether the Administration could provide a breakdown of the number of pigs slaughtered by size. He said that the catering industry had switched to use chilled suckling pigs instead of freshly slaughtered suckling pigs in recent years. DD(EH) said that the only data FEHD had was the consumption of fresh pork and beef by capita which was on the decline.

55. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether it was the fee structure of the slaughterhouses that encouraged the slaughtering of large pigs than small pigs. He said that the decrease in fresh beef consumption was due to the fear of mad cow disease and other health considerations.

56. AD(O)3 responded that different prices were charged for the slaughtering of large, medium and small pigs. As regards the decrease in consumption of fresh pork and beef, DD(EH) said that as explained in paragraph 53 above, there could be various reasons and one reason could be the trend of staying healthy by eating less meat.

VII Follow-up report on dietary exposure to mercury among secondary school students
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2930/03-04(06)]

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57. C(CM)(RAC) gave a powerpoint presentation on the follow-up study on dietary exposure to mercury of secondary school students. He said that there were certain limitations in the previous study as the data used were extracted from FEHD's food surveillance programme and the limit of detection was considered high if used for research studies. A follow-up study was therefore conducted with the availability of improved technology locally. The findings revealed that the exposure estimates for the average secondary school student and the high consumer fell below the provisional tolerable weekly intake level for mercury and methylmercury. Therefore, it could be concluded that they were unlikely to experience major undesirable health effects caused by total mercury and methylmercury. The findings were similar to those obtained in overseas studies.

58. C(CM)(RAC) further said that the findings of the study had been uploaded onto FEHD's website and also available at major libraries and FEHD Communication Resource Unit and Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre. To reduce the risk of excessive mercury exposure, people should maintain a balanced diet to avoid excessive risk of mercury exposure from a small range of food items. Susceptible groups such as children and pregnant women should be careful in food selection and should not consume excessive amount of predatory fish. As fish was a good source of quality protein and low in saturated fat, a moderate consumption of fish was recommended.

59. In reply to the Chairman, C(CM)(RAC) said that there was no difference in the intake of mercury for eating cooked fish and raw fish.

60. Dr LO Wing-lok asked about the meaning of consumption of "excessive amount of predatory fish". C(CM)(RAC) responded that in general, fish was safe to consume. He advised that for susceptible groups such as children and pregnant women, consuming more than two to three slices of sword fish or 10 to 30 slices of tuna per week would be considered excessive.

61. Mr WONG Yung-kan expressed appreciation of the follow-up study which had conveyed clear messages on the consumption of fish. He also sought clarification about methylmercury.

62. C(CM)(RAC) explained that methylmercury was an organic form of mercury that could not be seen by naked eyes, and it could cause adverse effect to the nervous system of foetus and young children.

VIII Draft report of the Panel for submission to the Legislative Council
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 2930/03-04(07)]

63. Members endorsed the draft report which gave an account of the work of the Panel during the 2003-04 legislative session. The Chairman said that the draft report

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would be updated to include the discussion at this meeting, before tabling at the Council meeting of 7 July 2004.

IX Any other business

64. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
31 August 2004