

**For discussion
on 13 December 2005**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

The Quality Seawater Assurance Scheme

Purpose

This paper briefs members on the Quality Seawater Assurance Scheme to be introduced early next year to enhance the quality of seawater used for keeping live seafood.

Background

2. The availability of a reliable source of seawater is important for ensuring the quality of fish tank water in keeping live seafood. The following measures have already been put in place by the Administration to improve the quality of the seawater used for such purpose :

- (a) All licensed food premises including fresh provision shops, restaurants, and market stalls selling live seafood are covered under a surveillance programme implemented by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) featuring regular inspection and collection of seawater samples from fish tanks for testing of *E.Coli*. A similar water quality monitoring programme is also administered with the assistance of the Fish Marketing Organization (FMO) for the live fish wholesale stalls in its fish wholesale markets;
- (b) The FMO provides supply of clean seawater on a cost recovery basis for wholesale market stalls and other operators from its fish wholesale markets at Aberdeen, Kwun Tong and Cheung Sha Wan; and
- (c) FEHD has issued guidelines to the trade to apprise them of the

filtration and disinfection methods and management practices recommended for the quality control of the fish tank water.

Besides, the Administration has plan to introduce legislation to prohibit the abstraction of seawater from certain designated areas with a high risk of pollution for use in keeping live seafood.

3. At the meeting of this Panel on 9 November 2004, we briefed members of a proposed “Accreditation Scheme for Seawater Suppliers”. After the meeting, we have appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) as the independent Accrediting Body to develop and implement the proposal. In the last few months, HKPC had consulted the major stakeholders to solicit their views on the proposal. A consultation seminar with seafood suppliers and catering industry members was also held in November. A number of operators have indicated interest to join the Scheme. Taking into considerations the opinions expressed by members of this Panel and the trade, we have finalized the details of the scheme which is now re-named as the “Quality Seawater Assurance Scheme” (the Scheme). It will be implemented on a voluntary basis and aims to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) to enhance the quality of seawater supplied by the seawater suppliers so as to minimize the risk of contamination of live seafood to protect public health;
- (b) to assist the seafood traders such as the seafood restaurants, wholesalers and retailers to have better control of the quality of their fish tank water for compliance with the legal standards; and
- (c) to help inform the public about the quality of the fish tank water of seafood restaurants and sales outlets.

The Scope of the Scheme

4. Under the Scheme, seawater suppliers who comply with the pre-set accreditation criteria can be accredited as the “Accredited Quality Seawater Supplier” and be issued an accreditation certificate. Seafood

restaurants/sales outlets complying with the accreditation criteria can be accredited as the “Quality Seawater Logo Holder” and be given a logo for posting in their business premises.

Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers

Classification of suppliers

5. Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers will be classified into three categories:

- i. Category I: suppliers of this category abstract and treat natural seawater by filtration and disinfection and supply it to the other operators for use in keeping live seafood. An example of this type is the FMO which supplies treated seawater to the other operators in the trade.
- ii. Category II: suppliers of this category are themselves seafood wholesalers/distributors. They abstract and treat natural seawater by filtration and disinfection and supply it to their own shops. They may also supply the treated seawater to the other seafood traders, often together with seafood. Some supermarket chain stores, as well as those seafood wholesalers who operate their own fishing vessels to obtain seawater from the sea are examples of this type.
- iii. Category III: suppliers of this category are those who obtain seawater from Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers in Category I or II above or prepare synthetic seawater from marine salt and tap water and distribute such seawater to the other seafood traders. Those suppliers who operate seawater delivery vehicles and supply seawater obtained from suppliers in Category I such as the FMO to seafood restaurants and other sales outlets are examples of this type.

Accreditation Criteria

6. The major requirements that must be complied with by the

Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers are as follows:

- i. assuring a quality source of seawater;
- ii. installing an effective filtration and disinfection system (applicable to Categories I and II suppliers only);
- iii. setting up and following an acceptable schedule of cleansing and maintenance for all equipment;
- iv. conducting regular sampling and analysis of seawater samples for *E. Coli.* concentration (applicable to category I and II suppliers only); and
- v. keeping properly the relevant records, including the records for seawater abstraction and treatment, acquisition of seawater or marine salts; supply of seawater to clients, maintenance and cleansing of equipment, seawater analysis results, etc. These records should be kept for at least one year for inspection by the Accrediting Body.

Prohibited areas for seawater abstraction

7. For category I and II suppliers, they are not allowed to abstract seawater from areas which show a high level of *E. Coli.*, including the Victoria Harbour, the typhoon shelters, the coastal area surrounding the Hong Kong Island and the coastal area in the western side of the New Territories. Suppliers of these categories will be required to keep information recorded by Global Positioning System (GPS) showing the locations from which their seawater is abstracted.

Assessment of seawater suppliers

8. On-site audits will be conducted by the Accrediting Body for application for accreditation as Category I and II Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers. Seawater samples will be taken from the applicants for analysis of *E. Coli.* concentration during the audit. For category III applications, the Accrediting Body will inspect the records of

acquiring water from Category I or II suppliers. On-site audit will be conducted when necessary. Accreditation will be granted to the successful applicants subject to annual renewal. They will be re-assessed in a similar way as their initial application prior to renewal of their accreditation.

Quality Seawater Logo Holders

9. Seafood sales outlets such as seafood wholesalers/restaurants and retail shops that acquire seawater from Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers or prepare their own synthetic seawater using marine salt and tap water are eligible to apply for accreditation as Quality Seawater Logo Holders. Upon successful application, they will be allowed to post a Quality Seawater Logo (Annex) in their premises to inform their customers that their seawater is quality assured.

Accreditation Criteria

10. The major requirements that must be complied with by the Quality Seawater Logo Holders are as follows:

- i. acquiring seawater from Accredited Quality Seawater Suppliers or preparing their own synthetic seawater from marine salt and tap water;
- ii. installing an effective filtration and disinfection system in their fish tanks;
- iii. setting up and following an acceptable schedule of cleansing and maintenance for all equipment; and
- iv. keeping properly the relevant records, including those for acquisition of seawater or marine salts, marine salt usage, equipment maintenance and cleansing, etc. for at least one year for inspection by the Accrediting Body.

Assessment of Quality Seawater Logo Holders

11. Accreditation will be granted to successful applicants subject to annual renewal. On-site audits will be conducted by the Accrediting Body for initial application whereas records and document inspection will

be conducted during annual renewal.

Merit and Demerit Points System

12. When non-compliance with the accreditation criteria are found, demerit points commensurate with the seriousness of the non-compliance will be deducted from the accredited operator concerned who will be required to rectify the non-compliance. If the cumulative demerit points amounts to 10 or more during any 12 month period, its accreditation status will be suspended.

13. To encourage the participants of the Scheme to fully comply with the accreditation criteria, any accredited operator with no demerit points deducted for a whole year will be awarded with a certificate bearing the remark of “excellence performance” for the next year.

Accreditation Fees

14. The scheme will be operated on a voluntary and self-financed basis. The accreditation fee to be charged to the different type of accredited operators is as follows -

Type of accredited operator	Basic initial and annual fees
Category I Accredited Quality Seawater Supplier	\$ 10 000 – \$15 000 (depending on the supply capacity of seawater)
Category II Accredited Quality Seawater Supplier	\$ 5 500 – \$15 000 (depending on the supply capacity of seawater)
Category III Accredited Quality Seawater Supplier	\$ 800
Quality Seawater Logo Holders	\$ 1 600 for initial application \$ 800 for renewal

Advice Sought

15. Members are invited to comment on the Scheme.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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Quality Seawater Logo

