

Motion Debate on
“Promoting the sustainable development of the
local agriculture and fisheries industries”
at the Legislative Council Meeting on 13 June 2007
Progress Report

The Legislative Council moved a motion debate on “Promoting the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fisheries industries” on 13 June 2007. This paper reports on the latest position of the work of the Government in respect of the motion.

Formulating policy for agricultural and fisheries development

2. The Government policy on agricultural and fisheries development is to promote sustainable development in these sectors by providing infrastructure, technical support and loan funds, implementing development and resource conservation plans, and providing training for local producers etc.

(1) Operating livestock farms on the Mainland

3. The Ministry of Commerce announced on 20 July 2007 that they supported in principle local pig farmers to invest in pig farms in the Mainland for export to Hong Kong. These farms must meet the relevant food safety, bio-security and environmental requirements in the Mainland.

(2) Development of the fisheries industry

4. The Government formed the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries last year to advise on the direction and long term goals for the sustainable development of the local fishing industry. The Committee is comprised of representatives from the fishing industry, academics and experts from various fields, government officials and Legislative Council members for making comprehensive and balanced recommendations on Hong Kong’s fisheries policy. To date, the Committee has had two rounds of discussions, attended a local and Mainland visit and a workshop and discussed in detail the development, trends, policies and management measures, ecological and economical sustainability of the industry, as well as local fisheries management and support measures to the trade. The Agriculture, Fisheries and

Conservation Department (AFCD) has arranged discussions between members and the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture on the Mainland's fisheries policies and latest developments. In addition, other AFCD advisory committees, comprising other experts and fishermen representatives, will also provide their views and knowledge for the government's consideration.

5. We have implemented various measures to assist the trade to develop new markets or convert to other sustainable modes of operation, including providing technical support, basic knowledge on offshore fishing operations and skills training courses, and liaison and loan services to assist fishermen to learn more about the offshore fishing facilities and work out their business plan and strategy.

6. Conservation of fisheries resources and provision of support to the fisheries industry are important components of our policy for fisheries development. We have implemented various conservation measures, such as the deployment of artificial reefs and designation of marine parks to facilitate the spawning of fishes.

(3) Promotion of the aquaculture industry

7. AFCD is assisting local fish farmers in acquiring hatchery and nursery technology. AFCD is planning to set up an experimental hatchery to provide the necessary technical support and training to local fish farmers. Improved culture techniques and good management practices are introduced by AFCD to fish farmers through organizing training workshops and seminars, distributing advisory leaflets and conducting on-farm demonstrations.

8. The Department implemented a voluntary Accredited Fish Farm Scheme in mid 2005 to help local fish farmers to raise production standards of the farms and the quality of cultured fish. Participating fish farms under the scheme are required to adopt a set of aquaculture best practices. Quality assurance tests, including analyses of drug residues and heavy metals in fish, are conducted to ensure that all cultured fish meet food safety standards before they are sold at market. In conjunction with the Fish Marketing Organisation and the industry (Hong Kong Federation of Aquaculture Associations and Hong Kong NT Fish Culture Association), the Department continues to publicise and promote the marketing of fish products under this brand name.

(4) Promotion of local organic farming

9. Since 2000, AFCD has been actively providing assistance to local farmers in developing organic farming through the provision of technical support on pest and disease management, horticultural practices, soil management, seed saving and other technical issues.

10. With the subsidies of the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO) to the Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre, a non-profit making body, a set of standards applicable to local organic produce has been formulated. Certification service is also provided and the certification trademarks are promoted to protect the rights of consumers. At present, there are 26 certified organic farms in Hong Kong. The future development of the local agriculture industry hinges on safe, quality produce. The Government will provide full support to farmers in enhancing the quality of their produce, establishing local brands and opening up sales outlets. Assistance will also be rendered to farmers who have shifted to organic farming to obtain certification.

11. AFCD has been developing the organic market for farmers through the VMO. There are more than 30 organic vegetables retail outlets under the VMO marketing network, including supermarkets, MTR shops, health food stores and the Lions Nature Education Centre outlet. A farmers' market has been set up in Tai Po in cooperation with the Federation of Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Societies Ltd., which provides a good opportunity for direct contact and communication between consumers and farmers. These contacts will allow the consumers to have a better understanding of the production process of organic vegetables and boost their confidence in buying them. If suitable sites can be identified, it is hoped that more farmers' markets will be set up in different districts.

(5) Perfecting the legislation to ensure the quality of local produce

12. The drafting process of the food safety law has already started. It is intended that the details of the new legislation will be put forward for public discussion during the 2007-2008 legislative session so that after collection of opinions from all sectors, the proposed legislation will be submitted to the Legislative Council for consideration, marking the beginning of the formal legislative process.

(6) Developing leisure fishing and farming activities

13. We will continue to assist fishermen to use their fishing vessels to develop leisure fishing operations. We are working with the Marine Department on the feasibility of using fishing vessels to carry passengers for leisure fishing activities and the related technical and safety issues. AFCD will provide technical assistance and loan service to facilitate fishermen to carry out the vessel modification works.

14. In respect of leisure agriculture, there are about 27 leisure farms in Hong Kong, mainly located in the rural parts of the territory, such as Fanling and Yuen Long. AFCD will continue to provide assistance to farmers on various areas including rehabilitation of agricultural land, installation of irrigation facilities, provision of technical assistance and facilitation of communication between farmers and other departments. Moreover, the Government has produced publications promoting eco-tourism, in order to enhance public interest in eco-tourism and in leisure agriculture. Leisure farms that have plans to build hostels to diversify their services can apply to the Planning Department and Lands Department. Such applications will be considered on their own merits.

(7) Opening up the market for livestock supply to Hong Kong from the Mainland

15. To help ensure the stable supply of live pigs, the Ministry of Commerce announced on 20 July 2007 to add Guangnan Hong as another agent apart from Ng Fung Hong to import live pigs directly from the Mainland. The Ministry has also agreed in principle to add a third agent, and Hong Kong people are welcome to form a company in Hong Kong to compete with the other two agents in importing live pigs.

Food and Health Bureau
August 2007