

Motion Debate on
“Promoting the Development of Leisure Agriculture and Fishery Trades”
at the Legislative Council Meeting on 18 March 2009

Progress Report

Purpose

The motion on “Promoting the Development of Leisure Agriculture and Fishery Trades” was passed by the Legislative Council at the meeting on 18 March 2009. The motion urges the Government to adopt various measures to promote the development of the leisure agriculture and fishery trades in Hong Kong, thereby fostering the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fishery industries. This paper reports to Members on the action taken by the Administration to follow up on the proposals made in the motion debate and the latest progress of the Government in fostering the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fishery industries.

Sustainable Development of Local Agriculture and Fishery Industries

2. The Government has all along been working diligently on formulating suitable policies and strategies to promote the sustainable development of local agriculture and fishery industries, including the provision of infrastructural support, technical assistance and advice, credit facilities and vocational training for local farmers and fishermen, as well as assistance for the industries to establish quality brand names. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has earmarked \$52 million for these purposes in the 2009-10 Estimates.

3. To promote the sustainable development of the fishery industries, the Government set up the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries in late 2006

to study the long-term goals for development of local fishery industry. The Committee has worked out the directions and proposed plans and measures in this respect. It also consulted fishermen and other relevant stakeholders at the end of 2008. The Committee is expected to submit a report to the Administration for consideration within 2009.

4. With respect to agriculture, the Administration has been actively assisting local farmers to capture high-value-market niches. For instance, the AFCD has since 2000 been helping the industries to develop organic farming by providing technical support to local organic farms to help farmers solve technical problems in plant diseases and pests, horticultural practices, soil management and seed saving, etc. The AFCD also works through the Vegetable Marketing Organization (VMO) to assist the industries to open up organic agricultural produce market. Currently there are over 30 retail outlets, including supermarkets and health food stores, etc., selling organic vegetables distributed through the VMO. By way of the Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre, the VMO has also drawn up a set of standards applicable to local organic agricultural produce, providing certification service and promoting its certification trademarks. These measures have positive effects on the development of the local organic agricultural produce market.

5. To help the industries develop quality brand names, the AFCD has implemented the Accredited Farm Scheme and the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme to encourage good husbandry practices with a view to facilitating the public in identifying quality agricultural and fishery products. Since their implementation, both schemes have received support from the agriculture and fishery trades and the general public. Currently a total of 215 vegetable farms and 82 fish farms have participated in the two voluntary schemes. The AFCD, the Fish Marketing Organization (FMO) and the VMO will continue to organize publicity and marketing activities for quality local agricultural and fisheries products.

Development of Leisure Agriculture and Fishery Trades in Hong Kong

6. To assist the trade to develop leisure fishery industries, the AFCD introduced a scheme in 2002 to allow fish farmers to operate leisure fishing business at their fish rafts, provided that the mariculture environment and public safety are safeguarded. So far, 36 licensees at nine fish culture zones have participated in the scheme. Besides, the AFCD will consult the industry on the need to review the existing procedures and criteria for approving applications for fish rafts to engage in leisure fishing activities.

7. Moreover, some fish farmers have suggested providing barbecuing and cooking activities, etc. in addition to leisure fishing. The Administration considers that it would be necessary to examine in detail the impact of these activities on food safety, environmental hygiene, fire safety and the mariculture operation and fish culture environment in the fish culture zones concerned. Since these activities involve the sale and handling of food, operators must observe the requirements in the *Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance* (Cap 132) and the *Food Business Regulation* (Cap 132X), including the need to obtain the relevant permit or licence issued by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department before conducting the activities. The Administration will continue to communicate with the trade on the issues above and provide suitable assistance.

8. The AFCD has been providing technical support and training to fishermen who are interested in switching to leisure fishery industries. In collaboration with the Marine Department, the AFCD will continue to study the technical details of converting fishing vessels for leisure fishing purposes and to consult the trade, with a view to assisting the conversion of fishing vessels for leisure fishing purposes while ensuring that the passenger safety standards are met. Besides, with regard to the operation of pleasure vessels and passenger carrying vessels, the AFCD will continue to provide training for fishermen in need to help them apply for and obtain the certificates for

operating these vessels. The Administration may also explore with training organizations on providing interested fishermen with training in business skills, safety management, as well as the practices, policies and legislations on tour operation, so that the business skills and service standards of leisure fisheries operators can be enhanced. Fishermen can also apply to the Marine Fish Scholarship Fund or the Continuing Education Fund for subsidies to take the relevant courses.

9. To conserve the natural environment, the Administration has designated 40% of the land area in Hong Kong as 24 country parks and 17 special sites by virtue of the *Country Parks Ordinance*. It has also designated, in accordance with the *Marine Parks Ordinance*, four marine parks and one marine reserve measuring a total of 2 430 hectares of sea area. Moreover, the Government has identified sites with special geological features and habitats of endangered species and rare plants, designating them as sites of special scientific interest. Currently there are 67 such sites in the Register of Sites of Special Scientific Interest. All these protected sites are subject to strict land use zoning and land development restrictions to protect their special scientific value.

10. To preserve cultural heritage such as traditional villages and fishing villages, the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum have been collecting relevant heritage items over the years. Besides, the Government has been striving to preserve and promote the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Hong Kong and plans to conduct a territory-wide survey on ICH, with a view to compiling an ICH inventory and establishing a database. The survey results will provide useful reference for promoting the conservation of traditional villages and fishing villages of historical significance. The Antiquities and Monuments Office also assists the Antiquities Advisory Board in the grading of traditional villages in Hong Kong. The graded traditional villages include Ham Tin

Tsuen in Sai Kung, Tai Long Tsuen in Sai Kung, Sha Lo Tung Lei Uk in Tai Po and Sha Lo Tung Cheung Uk in Tai Po.

11. To promote green and cultural tourism, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been conducting promotional and publicity activities through various channels. For example, starting from 2006, it has worked with the travel industry in developing the Northeast New Territories Islands Hopping Tour, which allows tourists to appreciate the natural ecology and characteristics of the fishing villages there. Green tourism is also introduced to tourists through publications and websites. Besides, the HKTB is committed to promoting local historical relics and monuments. It also works with the travel industry in packaging the attractions as feature itineraries for tourists. In traditional culture, the HKTB promotes special Chinese customs and festivals to tourists, such as the blessing ceremony of the Hung Shing Festival in Mui Wo, the Cheung Chau Bun Festival, and the annual Tin Hau Festival. These major celebration activities in various districts are highlighted to encourage tourists to experience first-hand the vibrancy of the local customs.

12. On the greening of agricultural land, fish ponds and woodlands, the Town Planning Board has formulated statutory plans for most rural areas in the New Territories, designating different land use zones, including “agriculture” and “green belt”. The statutory plans provide a highly transparent and flexible framework for the use of agricultural land, fish ponds and woodlands. Those concerned can implement appropriate leisure agriculture and fishery development plans based on the geographical features of different areas, market demand and development parameters of the land use zones. Take Pai Nai and Lau Fau Shan in Yuen Long as examples, there are many successful cases in which fish ponds have been turned into recreational fishing grounds with the planning permission of the Town Planning Board.

13. In conducting the planning studies, the Planning Department also takes into account the promotion of nature conservation and heritage tourism, etc. as an important development strategy. For instance, the current Study on Land Use Planning for the Closed Area has proposed to promote leisure agriculture, as well as eco-tourism, agricultural tourism and heritage tourism, in order to bring employment and economic benefits to the area. As most agricultural lands in the New Territories are private lands, market factor has to be considered in taking forward these developments. Moreover, efforts are made by the Government to facilitate the revitalization and greening of agricultural land in its policies, an example being the agricultural land rehabilitation services provided by the AFCD. The AFCD keeps information on abandoned agricultural lands. When an interested party has expressed intent to hire a piece of agricultural land, AFCD staff will arrange a meeting for the land owner and potential tenant to discuss the tenure arrangement. When the farmer starts land preparation, he can apply to hire a tractor from the AFCD at a charge to plough the land, and to borrow other agricultural machines, including cultivator, brush cutter and branch breaker free of charge. Furthermore, the AFCD also provides low-interest loan and technical farming support to the farmer.

14. Developing leisure agriculture and fishery industries not only helps promote the development of local community economy and tourism, but also provides farmers and fishermen with the opportunities of development or transformation apart from production. Changes in the operating environment have rendered it necessary for traditional operators in the industries to change their mode of operation accordingly, developing modern technology for the production of quality fishery and agricultural products, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of these products. On the other hand, for those farmers and fishermen who no longer choose to focus on fishery and agricultural production, they can transform by exploring new business fields and modes, such as leisure agriculture and fishery industries.

Food and Health Bureau

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