

ITEM FOR ESTABLISHMENT SUBCOMMITTEE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEAD 22 – AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

Subhead 000 Operational expenses

Members are invited to recommend to Finance Committee –

- (a) the creation of the following new rank in the Veterinary Officer grade –

Principal Veterinary Officer
(D1) (\$99,400 - \$108,650); and

- (b) the creation of the following permanent post in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department –

1 Principal Veterinary Officer
(D1) (\$99,400 - \$108,650)

PROBLEM

We need to strengthen staffing support at the directorate level in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to provide the support and high-level expertise required to enhance public veterinary services in Hong Kong.

PROPOSAL

2. We propose to create with immediate effect upon the approval of the Finance Committee –

/(a)

- (a) a new rank of Principal Veterinary Officer (PVO) (D1); and
- (b) a permanent PVO post in the Inspection and Quarantine Branch (IQB) of AFCD.

JUSTIFICATION

Proposed Creation of a New PVO Rank

3. The Veterinary Officer (VO) grade is a non-directorate professional grade, comprising the VO rank at the entry level and the promotion rank of Senior Veterinary Officer (SVO) serving in three departments, namely, AFCD, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). The Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC) is the head of the VO grade. As at 1 February 2011, there are 21 substantive VOs and seven substantive SVOs.

4. VOs are mainly deployed on work relating to investigation, diagnosis, prevention and control of animal diseases and zoonoses; monitoring and enhancement of animal welfare; inspection of animals and animal products for import and export; and licensing and enforcement of relevant legislation. SVOs are responsible for providing professional services and advice on various matters including animal diseases, prevention of cruelty to animals, control of import of livestock, protection of wild birds and mammals, food safety and animal management in parks. SVOs are supervised by the respective Assistant Directors in the three departments, who are not required to possess veterinary training.

5. The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service (Standing Commission) concluded the Grade Structure Review (GSR) for the VO grade in 2008 and considered a strong public veterinary service critical to the provision of high-level professional advice in the areas of food safety, public health, animal welfare and management. Given the increasingly important role of the VO grade in the above areas, the Standing Commission considered that there was a need for more senior and well-experienced VO grade members to lead the grade and represent Hong Kong in liaison and coordination with senior members of the profession in other jurisdictions. The Standing Commission also commented that there seemed to be a prima facie case to review whether it was functionally justified to establish another tier beyond the SVO level to provide high-level professional advice to guide the development of the relevant policies and implement the appropriate measures.

6. To follow up on the recommendation of the Standing Commission, AFCD conducted a review in early 2009 and concluded that it was necessary to create a PVO rank at the D1 level having regard to the increased complexity of work which calls for an enhanced professional leadership in the grade, a strengthened regulatory function of the veterinary profession, as well as a need for greater professional input in grade management. The detailed justifications are set out in paragraphs 7 to 15 below. In August 2009, the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service gave in-principle agreement to the proposed creation of a D1 rank for the VO grade.

I. Increased complexity of duties

7. The duties and responsibilities of the VO grade have increased in recent years, in terms of both scope and complexity. There is an increasing need for high-level professional input in animal disease control, policy formulation and decision making, as well as liaison and cooperation with international veterinary authorities. The increasing awareness of animal welfare and management issues has also called for review of the existing policies. As explained in paragraphs 8 to 13 below, many of the duties and responsibilities currently undertaken by the VO grade officers exceed the scope and level of responsibility of a senior professional (i.e. SVO) and should more appropriately be discharged by a directorate officer.

(a) High-level professional input in disease control

8. Scientists have established that about three-quarters of the emerging diseases affecting humans over the past two decades originated from animal sources¹ and almost all of them carry a high fatality rate in infected humans. To better protect Hong Kong against the spread of these diseases, the VO grade is required not only to provide veterinary services that rapidly detect emerging animal diseases and effectively contain their spread to humans, but also to exercise professional judgment and make decision from a broader perspective in the face of fast-developing incidents and, sometimes, public health crises. A professional VO at the directorate level can provide veterinary advice to ensure continued oversight of the emerging zoonotic diseases, and to liaise with professionals in other disciplines in safeguarding Hong Kong's food safety and public health.

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¹ Examples are avian influenza H5 and H7, West Nile, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (commonly known as mad cow disease), nipah virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Rift Valley fever, ebola virus and monkeypox.

(b) Increasing involvement of the VO grade in policy formulation and decision making

9. Timely professional veterinary advice at the strategic level has become indispensable in the formulation of policy on zoonotic diseases prevention and animal management. This goes beyond what a senior professional is expected to deliver. In order to ensure that Hong Kong is kept abreast of the best practices in respect of zoonotic disease prevention, and that our policies on food animal regulation and animal welfare progress with the times, we need to strengthen the directorate veterinary input in AFCD. The new directorate rank of PVO would fill the gap in our existing structure and help strengthen professional input in policy formulation and decision making on veterinary matters. This is also in line with the international practice of multiple-level structured public veterinary service.²

(c) Liaison and cooperation with international veterinary authorities

10. Ensuring the safety of food products of animal origin (e.g. meat, honey and milk) is a common concern of the international community. Liaison and cooperation with veterinary authorities in different jurisdictions as well as participation in and contribution to discussions of international bodies (e.g. the World Organisation for Animal Health and the World Health Organisation) have become an integral part of our public veterinary service. Many jurisdictions are represented at international forums by their veterinary officers with rich professional experience and considerable administrative and leadership skills in running public veterinary service. Such responsibilities exceed the requirements of an SVO. The proposed PVO, being a directorate officer with profound professional experience who oversees policy development, would be in a more suitable position to represent Hong Kong (or as part of the Mainland delegation) at meetings of relevant international bodies to protect and promote the interests of Hong Kong, and to maintain more effectively a close network with the Mainland and international veterinary authorities/organisations.

(d) Increasing awareness of animal welfare and management issues

11. In recent years, there are mounting concerns about animal welfare and animal management issues in the community, as evidenced by the motion debate at the Legislative Council (LegCo) sitting on 3 November 2010 on “Formulating an animal-friendly policy”. LegCo Members and animal welfare and animal rights concern groups have put up various suggestions, such as introducing additional legislative measures to prevent animal cruelty and promote animal welfare,

/enhancing

² For example, the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has a five-tier structure. At the top level, there are experienced veterinarians with rich professional experience and considerable administrative and leadership skills to steer and manage the Australian public veterinary services.

enhancing the regulation of pet shops and breeders, subsidising neutering of pets, and introducing a “Trap-Neuter-Release/Return” programme. At the same time, many people are gravely concerned about the danger, nuisance and environmental hygiene problems caused by stray animals and urge AFCD to remove them from their neighbourhood. Over 20 000 complaints relating to nuisance caused by dogs and cats not under proper control are received annually.

12. AFCD constantly reviews the relevant legislation, operational procedures and enforcement guidelines, and explains government policies to various sectors of the community. We need a directorate officer who possesses professional and management experience as well as sensitivity to community aspirations to plan and oversee the implementation of various animal welfare and management services.

(e) Rapid expansion of veterinary knowledge

13. Veterinary science is fast developing and an officer without appropriate technical and professional knowledge will find the trend towards sub-specialisation difficult to understand and interpret. For example, veterinary laboratory science now involves the application of advanced techniques for the diagnosis of various animal diseases. The consequential requirements for laboratory quality management and international laboratory accreditation are becoming increasingly complex. Our public veterinary service must be able to keep abreast of and respond to fast-changing developments in the various fields of veterinary science. The assessment of these trends and the identification of suitable training opportunities for an evolving public veterinary service require a dedicated directorate officer in the veterinary field with sufficient international exposure and a good grasp of the profession’s needs, especially in the context of public sector.

II. Professional input in grade management

14. We anticipate that the operational demands on the VO grade service will continue to rise in the years to come. It is important to strengthen the management, and promote the professionalism and career prospects of the grade to meet the challenges ahead. DAFC is the head of the VO grade and is assisted by the Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation and the Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (Inspection and Quarantine) (ADIQ) of IQB in the grade management work. Being an “open” directorate post, ADAFC posts can be filled by officers of either the VO grade or other professional grades (i.e. Agricultural Officer (AO), Fisheries Officer (FishO) and Forestry Officer (ForO) grades), hence not necessarily possessing veterinary training. In view of the growing complexity and specialised nature of the VO grade’s work, a professional veterinarian at the directorate level, underpinning ADIQ, can provide dedicated support and advice to strengthen the management of the VO grade.

III. Regulatory function of the veterinary profession

15. The Veterinary Surgeons Board (VSB) is a statutory body established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) for the regulation of the practice of veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong. The VSB is responsible for, among other things, setting the qualification standards for registration as veterinary surgeons³, making rules for professional conduct and discipline of registered veterinary surgeons, and dealing with complaints against registered veterinary surgeons. In addition to on-going executive and secretarial support, AFCD provides impartial professional veterinary advice upon request to the VSB. Coupled with the increasing trend of pet ownership and heightened awareness of animal welfare in recent years, the range and depth of issues on which the VSB requires AFCD's professional input have been on the rise. The creation of a PVO rank at the D1 level will enable AFCD to maintain the quality of professional veterinary service rendered to the VSB.

The Proposed PVO Post in AFCD

Encl. 1 16. IQB has seven divisions and is headed by ADIQ at the ADAFC rank. The existing organisation chart of AFCD is at Enclosure 1. Given the increased complexity of duties and rapid expansion of veterinary knowledge, ADIQ is already overloaded. There is an operational need for him to be assisted by a PVO with the necessary professional knowledge and experience to oversee animal management/welfare and animal/public health measures, as well as constantly develop improvement initiatives taking into account changing community expectations and the potential threat of existing and emerging zoonotic and animal diseases. The new PVO will directly supervise the Animal Management (Operations) Division, the Animal Management (Development) Division, the Animal Health Division and the Veterinary Laboratory Division. These divisions are primarily involved in the handling of animal welfare and animal management issues, and the control of animal diseases. These are areas with the most imminent needs for professional steer and supervision from the new PVO. Details are set out in paragraphs 17 and 18 below.

Animal management and welfare

17. The PVO will supervise the Animal Management (Operations) Division and Animal Management (Development) Division of IQB to spearhead various service development and improvement initiatives in animal management/welfare issues. As a result of a rising number of pet owners, increasing public awareness and higher demands from the public on animal welfare issues, there

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³ The number of veterinary surgeons has surged from about 190 in September 2000 to some 560 in end 2010.

is a significant expansion in the scope and level of responsibilities in animal management services provided by AFCD as illustrated in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. This trend is expected to continue. High level steer and directorate input from both management and veterinary angle are required on a full-time basis from the PVO to spearhead various service development and improvement initiatives. Major initiatives to be led by the proposed PVO include reviewing the current strategies and formulating enhanced measures for the management of stray dogs, cats and cattle; strengthening education and publicity efforts to promote responsible pet ownership and animal welfare; introducing enhanced animal rehoming services; devising a Dog “Trap-Neuter-Release/Return” Trial Scheme; reviewing the licensing control of animal trading activities; and formulating legislative proposals on animal management and animal welfare.

Control of animal diseases

18. The PVO will also supervise the Animal Health Division and the Veterinary Laboratory Division to provide high-level professional advice and leadership in the development of animal and public health measures to facilitate rapid detection and effective containment of emerging animal diseases. Specifically, the PVO will be closely involved in monitoring and controlling avian influenza and other zoonotic and animal diseases; overseeing the development and implementation of farm hygiene and biosecurity protocols; evaluating the monitoring of veterinary chemicals used in food animals; providing recommendations on the use and registration of vaccines and veterinary drugs; developing strategies for diagnostic and surveillance testing for livestock and other animals; and ensuring all laboratory testing protocols and procedures meet international standards. Considering the potential threat of new and emerging zoonotic and animal diseases as stated in paragraph 8 above, the aforementioned programmes and activities, which would facilitate rapid detection of emerging animal diseases and effective containment, are vital for protecting animal and public health.

Encl. 2 19. The proposed organisation chart with the creation of the PVO post in
Encl. 3 AFCD is at Enclosure 2. The proposed job description of the PVO post is at
Enclosure 3.

20. In AFCD, the senior professional level is the highest rank for the four grades in the department, namely AO, FishO, ForO and VO. At present, the ADAFC rank at D2 level is the promotion rank for officers at the senior professional level in these four grades. It is proposed that this arrangement should continue after the creation of the PVO rank and PVO post. In other words, the PVO and SVOs working in AFCD, FEHD and LCSD, as well as all the senior professional officers in the AO, FishO and ForO grades, would be eligible for and will compete on an equal basis for promotion to the ADAFC rank.

/ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

21. At present, ADIQ is the only directorate officer in IQB and may not possess a veterinary background. We have critically examined the current situation and consider it operationally undesirable and infeasible in the long run for the ADAFC of IQB to directly oversee the operational aspects of all the seven divisions in the Branch. In view of the operational and functional needs, we are of the view that a new PVO rank pitched at D1 level and a PVO post should be created to underpin ADIQ in respect of the Animal Management (Operations) Division, the Animal Management (Development) Division, the Animal Health Division and the Veterinary Laboratory Division.

22. Other ADAFCs in AFCD are working on a wide range of issues, including agricultural development, fisheries management, country and marine parks management and conservation services. It is not feasible to offload some of the existing duties of ADIQ to them as they are fully occupied with their existing workload and responsibilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

23. The notional annual salary cost at mid-point required for the proposed creation of the PVO post is \$1,265,400. The full annual average staff cost, including salaries and staff on-cost, is \$1,609,000. AFCD will absorb the additional expenditure from within their resources in 2011-12 and will include necessary provision in the Estimates of subsequent years to meet the cost of the proposal.

STAFF CONSULTATION

24. Members of the VO grade generally support the findings and recommendations of the GSR by the Standing Commission and AFCD's proposal to create the PVO rank and one PVO post. The proposal has the support of the other three professional grades (i.e. the AO, FishO and ForO grades) in AFCD.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

25. We consulted the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene at its meeting on 11 January 2011. Members in general supported the proposal. Some Members have requested more information on the need for an additional VO grade post at directorate level and the specific tasks to be undertaken by the proposed PVO. Relevant information has been incorporated into the paper.

/ESTABLISHMENT

ESTABLISHMENT CHANGES

26. The establishment changes in AFCD for the past two years are as follows –

Establishment (Note)	Number of posts			
	Existing (as at 1 February 2011)	As at 1 April 2010	As at 1 April 2009	As at 1 April 2008
A*	7#	7	7	7
B	134	129	124	120
C	1 843	1 823	1 775	1 765
Total	1 984	1 959	1 906	1 892

Note:

A – ranks in the directorate pay scale or equivalent.

B – non-directorate ranks the maximum pay points of which is above MPS Point 33 or equivalent.

C – non-directorate ranks the maximum pay point of which is at or below MPS Point 33 or equivalent.

* – excluding supernumerary post created under delegated authority.

– As at 1 February 2011, there was no unfilled directorate post in AFCD.

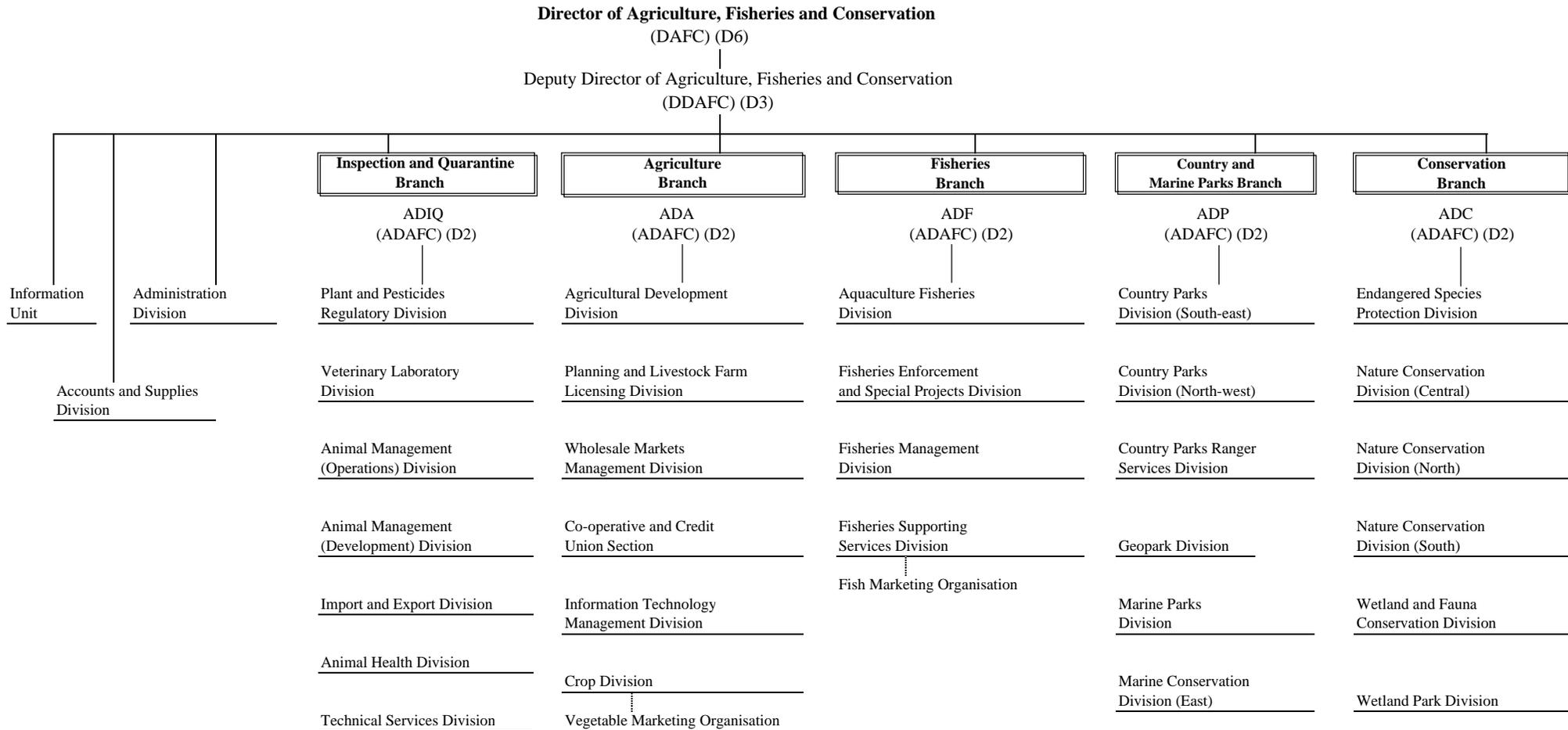
CIVIL SERVICE BUREAU COMMENTS

27. The Civil Service Bureau supports the proposed creation of the new rank of PVO and the proposed creation of a permanent PVO post. The grading and ranking of the proposed post are considered appropriate having regard to the level and scope of the responsibilities required.

ADVICE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON DIRECTORATE SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

28. The Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service has advised that the grading proposed for the post would be appropriate if the proposal were to be implemented.

Existing Organisation Chart of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department



Legend

- ADAFC - Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
- ADA - Assistant Director (Agriculture)
- ADC - Assistant Director (Conservation)
- ADF - Assistant Director (Fisheries)
- ADIQ - Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)
- ADP - Assistant Director (Parks)
- DAFC - Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
- DDAFC - Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

**Proposed Job Description
Principal Veterinary Officer**

Rank : Principal Veterinary Officer (D1)

Responsible to : Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Main Duties and Responsibilities –

1. To assist Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine) in the formulation and evaluation of animal disease control and animal management strategies and the development of operation systems to better anticipate and manage the emerging threats and challenges from animal diseases; and to take up the role of “veterinary epidemiologist/planning officer” for effectively minimising the impacts of any disease outbreaks and animal management crises.
2. To direct and supervise the work of the Animal Health Division, Veterinary Laboratory Division, Animal Management (Operations) Division and Animal Management (Development) Division under the Inspection and Quarantine Branch. Key duties include –
 - (a) develop operation and prosecution procedures and guidelines for key processes of animal management activities;
 - (b) plan, implement and evaluate education and publicity programmes on responsible pet ownership, animal welfare and other animal management issues;
 - (c) oversee the control of rabies, avian influenza and other livestock disease control programmes;
 - (d) develop strategies for diagnostic and surveillance testing for livestock and other animals;
 - (e) oversee the development of farm hygiene and biosecurity protocols;
 - (f) give recommendations for the registration of veterinary drugs and vaccines; and
 - (g) ensure all laboratory testing protocols and procedures meet international standards.

3. To provide high-level professional input and technical support to facilitate formulation of government policy, review of legislations, implementation of contingency plans/measures on animal disease control, animal welfare and animal management matters; to explain government policies to the Executive Council, Legislative Council, District Councils and political parties, etc. and to develop proactive and effective risk communication partnership with major stakeholders to address public concerns on related issues.
4. To represent the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (or as part of the Mainland delegation) at meetings with relevant international bodies for protecting and promoting the interests of Hong Kong; and to maintain a close network with relevant Mainland and international authorities/organisations to handle public health issues requiring high-level veterinary involvement.
5. To enhance the professional competencies and performance of the Veterinary Officer (VO) grade through the provision of professional input in management of the VO grade and various training and development initiatives.
6. To oversee the veterinary service development and professional regulatory issues in Hong Kong including the formulation and provision of public sector input in respect of veterinary education, registration and professional conduct of veterinarians; and to facilitate the works of the Veterinary Surgeons Board by representing the public veterinary services and providing the high-level and impartial professional advice that the Board requires.
