

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1163/10-11
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 11 January 2011, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC

Members absent : Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon WONG Yuk-man

Public Officers attending : Items III to V

Prof Gabriel M LEUNG, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Items III and IV

Mr Owin FUNG Ho-yin
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 3

Dr Thomas SIT Hon-chung
Assistant Director (Inspection & Quarantine)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Item III

Dr Shirley Veronica CHUK Sheung-ying
Senior Veterinary Officer (Animal Health)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Item IV

Dr LEUNG Siu-fai
Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Item V

Miss Diane WONG Shuk-han
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Mr WONG Kai-tat
Chief Engineer/Mainland South
Drainage Services Department

Ms CHU Lan-ying
Assistant Director (Operations) 3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr Andrew TSANG, JP
Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2)

Mr Ricky CHUI Kin-ming, JP
Assistant Director (Finance)
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mr FUNG Man-lok
Assistant Director (Youth and Corrections)
Social Welfare Department

Ms NGAR Yuen-ngor
Senior Country Park Officer (South-east)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Tom CHENG Lung-tak
Senior Marine Officer (Port Logistics)
Marine Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Maisie LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2) 6

Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 7

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(2)640/10-11(01))

Members noted that the Administration had provided a response to Mr Albert CHAN's letter dated 8 December 2010 concerning the regulation of pesticide. The Chairman informed members that subsequent to the Administration's reply, Mr Albert CHAN had written in (LC Paper No. CB(2)803/10-11(01)) and requested the Panel to discuss the matter. Members agreed that the subject matter should be included in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)713/10-11(01) to (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 15 February 2011 -

- (a) Liquor licensing review; and
- (b) Code of practice for pig farming.

3. The Chairman referred members to item 9 of the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion and advised that he had proposed earlier to

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discuss the review of the Hawker Regulation (Cap. 132 sub. leg. AI) to expand the nature of the commodities permitted to be sold by holders of the Itinerant (Frozen Confectionery) Hawker Licences. After taking into account the Administration's response which was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)686/10-11(01), the Chairman suggested and members agreed that the subject should be deleted from the list.

4. In view of the recent reports on some German farms which might have been contaminated with dioxins, Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned about the safety consumption of concerned food products from Germany and enquired about the latest developments of the food tests being conducted by the Administration on eggs, poultry products and pork imported from Germany.

5. Under Secretary for Food and Health ("USFH") said that the Centre for Food Safety was conducting dioxin tests on samples of egg, poultry products, pork and pork sausages imported from Germany, and it had issued press releases on the latest developments and findings. He further said that it would take about one week for examination and testing of the samples and the test results were expected to be available next week.

6. The Chairman enquired whether there were any restrictions on the import of German food products at this stage. USFH responded that according to the European authorities, the contaminated products were mainly consumed locally in Germany or exported to the United Kingdom. The quantity of eggs imported from Germany accounted for about 1% of the total imported eggs. Nevertheless, as a precautionary measure, the public were advised not to consume the concerned products for the time being. The Administration was requested to provide the test results for dioxin levels in eggs, poultry products, pork and pork sausages imported from Germany when available.

III. Chicken Vaccine (Avian Influenza Vaccine Trial of a Chinese-Origin (Re-5) Vaccine)

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)713/10-11(03) to (04) and CB(2)804/10-11(01))

7. USFH briefed members on the field trial programme to evaluate the efficacy of the Harbin Re-5 H5N1 Avian Influenza ("AI") vaccine ("Re-5 vaccine") against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza ("HPAI") viruses in local chicken farms as detailed in the Administration's paper.

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8. With the aid of powerpoint presentation, Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)/Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AD(I&Q)/AFCD") took members through the design and progress of the field trial in two local chicken farms.

9. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired why the field trial programme was not carried out in all local chicken farms and the type of vaccine being used in the chickens imported from the Mainland.

10. USFH replied that the Re-5 vaccine was used in all chickens produced in the Mainland for export to Hong Kong. Notwithstanding that the vaccine studies had shown that the Re-5 vaccine provided similar or even better protection as compared with the Intervet Nobilis H5N2 vaccine ("Intervet vaccine") currently used on chickens in local farms, it had only been tested in laboratories but not in farm conditions. The Administration therefore considered it prudent to conduct field trial in two local farms in the first place. The Investigation Group on Vaccine Study ("IGVS") would, on the basis of the results of the field trial and data analysis, recommend the proper choice of vaccines to be used in local chicken farms to the Government with a view to providing the most effective protection to the local chicken population against HPAI virus.

11. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that the Administration was over-cautious to conduct a full-year field trial in only two local chicken farms. Given that the Re-5 vaccine had been used in all chickens imported from the Mainland and its efficacy had been proven, the Re-5 vaccine could be used in all local chickens as early as possible.

12. USFH said that although the Re-5 vaccine was the main vaccine used on chickens reared in the Mainland for export to Hong Kong for protection against HPAI, it had not been tested on chickens raised under local farm conditions. It had yet to observe whether the switch from the Intervet vaccine to the Re-5 vaccine would have any adverse effect on chickens under local farm conditions. The Administration considered that there was a genuine need to conduct field trial in local farms in order to comprehensively evaluate the efficacy of Re-5 vaccine against HPAI viruses. IGVS would make a recommendation on the proper choice of vaccine based on the results of the field trial and data analysis.

13. Mr WONG Kwok-hing further asked whether the maximum number of chicken being reared in local farms could be lifted if the Re-5 vaccine was proven effective in protecting local chickens from the HPAI viruses. USFH advised that as the strain of the AI virus would change from time to time, it

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was necessary to evaluate whether the Re-5 vaccine would be a more suitable choice of vaccine to be used in local chicken farms having regard to such changes. The field trial aimed to evaluate the efficacy of the Re-5 vaccine against HPAI viruses in local chicken farms. The field trial had no relationship to the rearing capacity of the local chicken farms.

14. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that in the event that there was an AI outbreak in a local chicken farm, the Administration would, in accordance with the existing arrangement, cull all the chickens in the farm concerned and the nearby farms. Given the risk of an AI outbreak during the trial period could not be ruled out, Mr WONG asked whether such arrangement was applicable to those farms participated in the field trial, and if so, he was concerned that the livelihood of nearby chicken farmers would be affected adversely. He sought information on the measures to be taken in case of AI outbreaks in the participating farms.

15. The Chairman shared Mr WONG Yung-kan's concern. Since the efficacy of the Re-5 vaccine had yet to be evaluated, the Chairman considered that it might be more appropriate to conduct field trial outside Hong Kong to prevent the possible AI outbreaks in the participating farms.

16. USFH advised that testing on vaccinated chickens in field conditions would be conducted in accordance with international standards and practice, i.e. the vaccines would first be tested in laboratories to confirm their safety and efficacy, followed by laboratory challenge studies on animals. He said that three research institutions which were recognized by the World Health Organization had been engaged to conduct AI laboratory challenge studies for chickens vaccinated with the Re-5 vaccine. The studies had shown that the Re-5 vaccine had provided similar or even better protection as compared with the Intervet vaccine. As the Re-5 vaccine had not been tested in chickens in local farms, and hence the use of the Re-5 vaccine in all local chickens was not recommended at the present stage.

17. USFH further said that should there be any irregularities in any of the participating farms during the trial period, actions would be taken in accordance with the established AI contingency plan. The Administration would monitor closely the situation of the vaccinated chickens and stay vigilant against AI throughout the trial period.

18. Mr WONG Yung-kan was given to understand that the Re-5 vaccine was being used widely in the Mainland as well as in many other countries and some of the Mainland veterinarians had indicated that they had confidence in the efficacy of the Re-5 vaccine. Mr WONG considered that the

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Administration could make a bold move in using the Re-5 vaccine. Noting that the field trial had been launched for about two months, Mr WONG sought information on the preliminary findings.

19. AD(I&Q)/AFCD said that since the launch of the field trial in early November 2010, the vaccinated chickens had not responded adversely to the Re-5 vaccine. The Intervet vaccine and the Re-5 vaccine had comparable efficacy. As regards the serology data, since the H5 antibody in chickens would increase after the second vaccination, it would take about one more month before the data could be available. Tests for the H5 viruses in both environmental samples and cloacal swabs collected from chickens had been conducted and had yielded negative results so far.

20. Mr WONG Sing-chi asked the reason why the Administration was refrained from using Re-5 vaccine widely in all local chickens and whether it had assessed the consequences and the implications to the community at large of using the Re-5 vaccine in all local chickens right away but was later found inefficacious.

21. USFH said that as no AI outbreak had occurred in local chicken farms since December 2008, there was no imminent threats posed to public health. The proper choice of vaccines was merely for providing the most effective protection to the local chicken population against HPAI viruses. As such, serological tests would be conducted to determine whether the Re-5 vaccine was effective in protecting chickens from HPAI viruses. One of the key indicators of the efficacy of the Re-5 vaccine was the level of H5 antibody in vaccinated chickens. The vaccine challenge studies conducted in laboratories had provided useful information such as the survival rate of the vaccinated chickens, the spreading of the residual virus, etc. USFH added that while the chance of AI outbreak during the trial period was remote, environmental samples would be collected from each farm for AI virus testing to monitor the presence of AI viruses in the farm environment.

22. In response to Mr WONG sing-chi's enquiry, USFH said that the field trial would be conducted for a period of up to 12 months. Independent scientists would verify the data analysis prepared by the Administration and make recommendations for IGVS's consideration.

23. The Chairman enquired whether it was feasible for the Administration to collaborate with the Mainland farms which had exported chickens to Hong Kong to conduct the field trial and serological tests in the Mainland chicken farms to reduce the risk of AI infection in local farms during the trial period.

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24. USFH reiterated that laboratory testing for the Re-5 vaccine was conducted in Harbin. As it was unprecedented on switching from the use of Intervet vaccine to the Re-5 vaccine on chickens reared in Hong Kong, it was necessary to conduct the relevant field trial in local farm conditions.

25. In response to the Chairman's question about the cost of the Re-5 vaccine, AD(I&Q)/AFCD said that the average cost per dosage of the Re-5 vaccine was less than \$1, which was roughly half of that of the Intervet vaccine.

IV. Creation of a Principal Veterinary Officer post in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
(LC Paper No. CB(2)713/10-11(05))

26. USFH briefed members on the proposals to create a new rank of Principal Veterinary Officer ("PVO") pitched at D1 level in the Veterinary Officer ("VO") grade and a permanent PVO post in the Inspection and Quarantine Branch ("IQB") of AFCD, as detailed in the Administration's paper.

27. Mr WONG Yung-kan said that in recognition of the important role of the veterinary profession, Members belonging to the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment supported the staffing proposals. Mr WONG asked whether the proposed PVO would be responsible for promoting the development of the livestock trade.

28. USFH advised that the proposed PVO would be responsible for, among other things, overseeing the development and implementation of farm hygiene, developing strategies for diagnostic and surveillance testing for livestock as well as farm management policies to enhance operational efficiency of livestock farms.

29. In response to Mr WONG's further enquiry as to whether consideration would be given to offering local undergraduate degree programmes on veterinary science, USFH advised that the practice of veterinary surgeons were currently regulated by the Veterinary Surgeons Board ("VSB") established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529). VSB was also responsible for setting the qualification standards for registration as veterinary surgeons. Nonetheless, AFCD would continue to make periodic review of the manpower requirements and service needs for veterinary surgeons.

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30. Citing the problem of stray cattle causing obstruction to the traffic and road users in the Lantau Island as an example, Mr WONG Kwok-hing criticised the Administration's slow progress in introducing a "Trap-Neuter-Release/Return" programme to control the number of stray animals on the one hand, and protect the welfare of animals on the other hand. Noting that the proposed PVO was responsible to, among other things, spearhead service development and improvement measures in animal management/welfare issues, Mr WONG asked about the concrete measures to be formulated in this regard.

31. Deputy Director/AFCD advised that in the past few years, AFCD had been maintaining discussion with residents of the Lantau Island and animal rights concern groups on the issue of stray cattle. Given the divergent views over whether stray cattle should be removed from the neighborhood of the residents, AFCD had to strike a proper balance between safeguarding the welfare of stray cattle in the natural environment and reducing the nuisances caused by them to the public. The incumbent of proposed PVO post would enhance communication with the stakeholders and take forward the planning and implementation of policies on animal management and the enhancement of animal welfare.

32. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that he would support the staffing proposal on the understanding that the Administration would formulate expeditiously concrete initiatives in respect of animal welfare and management issues, including the problem of stray cattle. He pointed out that a motion on "Formulating an animal-friendly policy" was passed at the Council meeting on 3 November 2010 but the Administration had yet to map out the way forward. The Chairman added that the Administration should provide supplementary information in this regard in preparing its submission of the proposal to the Establishment Subcommittee ("ESC") for consideration and the Finance Committee ("FC") for approval.

33. Mr Alan LEONG said that the Civic Party had all along been promoting the formulation of an animal-friendly policy. He enquired whether the proposed PVO would be tasked to develop an animal-friendly policy and if so, the timetable for introducing the policy.

34. USFH advised that the proposed PVO would, amongst other duties, direct and supervise the work of the newly established Animal Management (Development) Division under IQB of AFCD to spearhead various service development/improvement initiatives in animal management/welfare issues. He assured members that efforts had been and would continue to be made to improve the existing measures on animal welfare, irrespective of whether the

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Administration had formulated a so-called animal-friendly policy.

35. In response to Mr LEONG's further enquiry as to whether the creation of a PVO post in AFCD would facilitate the formulation of an animal-friendly policy, USFH stressed that the Administration attached great importance to the matter of animal welfare. Given that the Animal Management (Development) Division had just been set up for about six months, the Division would first implement various service initiatives in hand. For instance, it would continue to liaise with the animal welfare organisations concerned to discuss the details of the introduction of a "Trap-Neuter-Release/Return" programme. It was expected that the creation of the PVO post would help provide professional steer on animal welfare policies.

36. Mr Alan LEONG said that Members belonging to the Civic Party generally supported the proposals. He requested the Administration to further elaborate on the duties and responsibilities of the proposed PVO post relating to animal management.

37. Referring to Enclosure 2 of the Administration's paper, the Chairman sought clarification as to whether the Veterinary Laboratory Division, the Animal Management (Operations) Division, the Animal Management (Development) Division and the Animal Health Division were the only Divisions in AFCD which would be put under the direct supervision of a directorate officer at D1 level upon the creation of the proposed PVO post in IQB of AFCD.

38. USFH replied in the affirmative. USFH advised that the proposal to create a new PVO rank at the D1 level was in response to the recommendation of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service that there was a need to review whether it was functionally justified to establish another tier beyond the Senior Veterinary Officer level to provide high-level advice to guide the development of relevant policies and implement the appropriate measures.

39. The Chairman said that having regard to increasing public concern about animal welfare and animal management issues in recent years, the Liberal Party was in support of the staffing proposals to strengthen professional input in this regard. The Chairman further said that during the motion debate on "Formulating an animal-friendly policy", Members belonging to the Liberal Party and other Legislative Council Members had made various suggestions on the subject matter, and the Administration had yet to respond to these suggestions. To this end, the Administration should elaborate on how the creation of a PVO post could facilitate policy

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development on animal management/welfare and animal/public health. The Chairman then sought more information on why these responsibilities could not be assumed by the existing Assistant Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation of IQB bearing in mind that the number of local poultry farms had reduced significantly in recent years.

40. USFH responded as follows -

- (a) in view of the rising trend of emergence of infectious diseases affecting humans originated from animal sources, such as avian influenza, severe acute respiratory syndrome and human swine influenza ("HSI"), as well as the increasing risks of trans-boundary movements of exotic disease agents due to the globalisation of trade, there was a need for more senior and seasoned VO grade member to lead the grade and represent Hong Kong in liaison and co-ordination with senior members of the profession in the Mainland and other jurisdictions;
- (b) the increasing concern over animal welfare issues in the community in recent years also called for the need to have a directorate rank officer possessing the veterinary training to take forward the planning and implementation of various services on enhancement of animal welfare; and
- (c) although the number of local poultry farms had reduced in recent years, there was a greater need for the development and implementation of farm hygiene and biosecurity protocols to prevent and control any outbreak of animal diseases.

41. In closing, the Chairman said that members raised no objection to the proposals to create a new rank of PVO pitched at D1 level in the VO grade and a permanent PVO post in IQB of AFCD. Members, however, took the view that the Administration should provide supplementary information, in preparing its submission to ESC and FC for approval, on the strategic role to be played by the proposed PVO post on animal management work, in particular relating to animal welfare.

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V. Progress report on measures to step up environmental hygiene to tackle human swine influenza

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)713/10-11(06) and (07))

42. USFH briefed members on the final report of the progress of the

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initiatives taken by the Drainage Services Department, the Food and Environmental Health Department ("FEHD"), the Home Affairs Department ("HAD"), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the Social Welfare Department, AFCD and the Marine Department to enhance environmental hygiene to tackle HSI, as detailed in the Administration's paper.

Creation of job opportunities

43. Noting that a total of more than 3 800 time-limited jobs had been created by the seven departments for implementing the various initiatives, Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the departments concerned would continue to employ these workers upon completion of the work on enhancing environmental hygiene.

44. USFH advised that all the time-limited posts were created with an additional approved provision. Many of these workers were staff hired by outsourced contractors, and the duration of their employment would depend very much on their respective terms of employment.

Cleaning up of environmental hygiene blackspots

45. The Chairman noted that all the 105 environmental hygiene blackspots identified in July 2009 had been removed from the list by February 2010 after thorough cleansing. He asked whether the Food and Health Bureau would take the lead and co-ordinate the efforts of relevant parties, such as HAD and the District Councils ("DCs") concerned, to continue to monitor the environmental hygiene situation in these areas to prevent the recurrence of environmental hygiene problems.

46. Dr Joseph LEE raised a similar question, and further asked whether consideration would be given to updating and making public the list of environmental hygiene blackspots.

47. USFH responded as follows -

- (a) many of the blackspots were located at private rear lanes. Apart from providing enhanced cleansing services, FEHD and HAD had, with the assistance of the DC concerned, appealed to the owners of these premises to up-keep the cleanliness of their premises. It was noteworthy that public money should not be used for the enhanced cleansing of these areas on a continuous basis and that the sustainability of the environmental hygiene of these private areas would depend largely on the concerted efforts

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of the owners and the community;

- (b) environmental hygiene issue at the district level had all long been an issue of concern to DCs. Hence, District Officers would co-ordinate the efforts of different parties in tackling identified environment hygiene problems at the districts level. It had also been an established practice that the District Superintendent of FEHD would attend regular meetings of DCs in this regard. Minutes of DC meetings would be made available on the website of the relevant DC for viewing by the public; and
- (c) as part of the campaign launched by the Administration in May 2009 to step up environmental hygiene in the fight against HSI, FEHD had identified 105 environment hygiene blackspots, in consultation with DCs, throughout the territory which required additional cleansing services with additional resources. Although the allocation of provision for the departments concerned to enhance environmental hygiene in the fight against HSI was one-off, the efforts to enhance environmental hygiene by these departments would continue. Actions had been and would continue to be taken by DCs, FEHD or HAD, where appropriate, to eradicate any environment hygiene blackspots.

Cleansing services for private buildings without management bodies

48. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about the cleansing work for private buildings without owners' corporations, Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2) advised that with the approved provision, HAD had engaged contractors/non-governmental organisations to provide cleansing services for the common areas of private buildings without property management bodies. Efforts had also been made by HAD to promote messages on the importance of environmental hygiene and appeal to owners of these buildings to up-keep the cleanliness of their premises. Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2) further said that FEHD had also thoroughly cleansed the common parts of some other private buildings without property management bodies.

Use of the remaining provision

49. Noting that the additional provision for the seven departments to launch a series of environmental hygiene initiatives to tackle HSI had not been used up entirely, Mr Alan LEONG enquired whether the Administration would consider using the remaining provision to conduct publicity and public education programmes to sustain its environmental hygiene promotion efforts.

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50. USFH responded that the additional provision was allocated for carrying out the specific work targets as set out in the funding proposals to FC, any unused provision should be returned to the general account of the Treasury after the work targets had been completed. USFH assured members that departments concerned would continue to monitor the environmental hygiene situation in areas falling under their purview carefully, and would implement appropriate measures that were instrumental in improving the environmental hygiene situation.

VI. Any other business

51. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:10 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
28 February 2011