

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)187/10-11(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 November 2010

Restrictions on public access to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the restrictions on public access to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries upon detection of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza ("HPAI") viruses in wild birds collected from these areas or their vicinity.

Background

2. The first infection of humans with an avian influenza virus occurred in Hong Kong in 1997 when the H5N1 strain infected 18 people, resulting in six deaths. Since early 2004, outbreaks of avian influenza or infections in birds were found also in other places of the world. Overseas studies have shown that migratory water birds are natural carriers of HPAI virus. These birds may infect poultry along their migration and spread the virus to other birds when congregating.

3. Every year, over 100 000 migratory birds visit Hong Kong. Given the risk that HPAI viruses can be transmitted from other regions to Hong Kong via migratory wild birds, the Administration has assessed the risk of HPAI-infected wild birds to local public health in order to set guidelines based on which decisions would be made on the shutting down and re-opening of the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and other public walk-in aviaries when HPAI-infected wild birds are found in Hong Kong.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. At the meeting on 11 July 2006, the Panel was briefed on the criteria set for managing public access to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries after any live or dead bird samples tested positive for HPAI viruses were collected from these areas or their vicinity.

5. Members were advised that based on the local epidemiological picture of HPAI in wild birds and the assumption that all HPAI viruses found could be transmitted from wild birds to humans directly or indirectly through contaminated materials, it was recommended that if dead wild birds were found to have H5 virus within 3 km radius of the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the outdoor section of the Hong Kong Wetland Park, the walk-in aviaries managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Ocean Park would be closed to public access for a period of 21 days.

6. Members were further advised that during the closure period, surveillance would be increased with the sampling rate doubled. Routine surveillance of bird population for H5 virus with, for example, 200 samples of droppings being tested per "21 days" would be increased to 400 samples per "21 days". If all tests were negative during the "21 days", the premises/facilities concerned would be re-opened. If any test was positive during the "21 days", public access to these premises/facilities would continue to be restricted and monitoring would continue for another "21 days" from the day of sampling with positive result.

7. In response to members on the reason for not drawing up corresponding measures in the urban areas where dead birds with H5 virus were found, the Administration advised that wild birds were mainly clustered in the Mai Po Nature Reserve and walk-in aviaries where the public might have very close contact with those birds or their droppings. The Administration therefore decided that the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the outdoor section of the Hong Kong Wetland Park and the walk-in aviaries would be closed to the public for 21 days if dead birds found within a 3 km radius were tested positive for H5 virus. The "3 km radius" rule was used by many European countries including the United Kingdom, France and Germany for setting a quarantine restricted zone, and the World Organisation for Animal Health recommended a 21-day surveillance period for H5 virus for live birds in an affected compartment/zone. The Administration further advised that it would step up publicity to remind the public not to contact wild birds and their droppings.

8. On the question of whether the proposed criteria for closing the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and walk-in aviaries for 21 days would also apply to chicken farms located within 3 km radius of these areas, if dead birds found within a 3 km radius were tested positive for H5 virus, the

Administration advised that biosecurity measures had been adopted by local chicken farms and all local chickens were vaccinated against H5 virus. The proposed criteria would only be applicable to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and walk-in aviaries, and not chicken farms in these areas.

9. Members expressed support for the proposed criteria and urged the Administration to meet with the World Wide Fund Hong Kong, who was the Manager of the Mai Po Nature Reserve, and the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society to further discuss the implementation of the guidelines.

Latest development

10. The Administration will brief the Panel on the review on the restrictions on public access to the Mai Po Nature Reserve, the Hong Kong Wetland Park and other walk-in aviaries upon detection of HPAI viruses in wild birds collected from these areas or their vicinity at the meeting on 9 November 2010.

Relevant papers

11. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk> to view the Administration's papers for and the relevant minutes of the meeting of the Panel on 11 July 2006.