

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 9 March 2012**

Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
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Madam Chairman and Honourable Members,

The Food and Health Bureau is committed to ensuring food safety and environmental hygiene with a view to promoting public health and improving people's quality of life.

2. In the 2012-13 Estimates, about \$5.5 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene", representing an increase of \$360 million (6.9%) over the previous year.

3. New resources available in the next financial year are mainly to provide –

- an additional \$160 million to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to cope with the financial impact arising from the implementation of Statutory Minimum Wage on outsourcing contracts;
- an additional \$7.4 million to strengthen food surveillance and radiological monitoring to ensure that imported foods are safe for consumption;
- an additional \$5.7 million to administer a one-off assistance package to trawler vessel owners, local deckhands and fish collector owners affected by the trawl ban and other related measures;
- an additional \$4.9 million to enhance animal management programmes including the strengthening of stray cattle/buffalo management and implementation of a Trap-Neuter-Return trial programme for stray dogs;

4. I will now proceed to outline the policy priorities and work progress.

Food Safety

5. The Food Safety Ordinance, which fully commenced on 1 February 2012, has introduced the food tracing mechanism, by establishing the registration scheme for food importers and food distributors and requiring food traders to maintain proper transaction records to enhance food traceability. At present, a total of over 7 300 food importers and food distributors have registered under the Ordinance. The Harmful Substances in Food (Amendment) Regulation 2011 also commenced on 1 March 2012 to prohibit the presence of harmful substances, including exogenous estrogens, in dried milk, condensed milk and reconstituted milk. We will continue to improve our food surveillance system and food safety standards. Over the past year, we have consulted the trade, the public as well as the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on the regulatory framework for pesticide residues in food and gained general support. The relevant regulation will be tabled at the LegCo for scrutiny within the current legislative session.

Review of Columbarium Policy

6. On increasing the supply of columbarium facilities, the Government has identified 24 potential sites in all 18 districts across the territory. Of these, the Diamond Hill Columbarium extension project will soon be completed while the Cheung Chau Cemetery extension project will commence in early 2013 and is expected to be completed in late 2013. The Government is forging ahead with the technical feasibility studies related to remaining sites and will consult relevant District Councils from the second quarter of 2012 onwards. Subject to the support of the Legislative Council and District Councils, it is estimated that together with the supply of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries, the Government will be able to provide over 120 000 new niches in the coming five years (i.e. 2012-16), and the supply of new niches will cumulatively increase to hundreds of thousands in the medium and long term (i.e. 2017-31).

7. On enhancing regulation of private columbaria, the Administration is conducting a public consultation on the proposed licensing scheme for private columbaria till 30 March 2012. We will carefully analyse the views and comments received before finalising the legislative proposals.

8. Prior to the introduction of the licensing scheme, we will strengthen consumer education and continue our efforts in facilitating transformation of social

custom by encouraging the public to use more environmentally friendly and sustainable means of handling cremains.

Sustainable Fisheries Development

9. Last year was an important year for promotion of sustainable fisheries development. The legislation relating to the trawl ban in Hong Kong waters will take effect at the end of this year. The Interdepartmental Working Group for the trawl ban is also handling matters relating to the one-off assistance package and is expected to complete the vetting of the applications for ex-gratia allowances before the end of this year. The LegCo is also scrutinising the Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill introduced by the Government. The Bill aims to develop a registration system for local fishing vessels, prohibit fishing activities of non-local fishing vessels in Hong Kong waters and designate Fisheries Protection Areas. I am grateful to the Bills Committee for actively following up on the scrutiny of the Bill and hope the Bill can be passed soon.

10. Moreover, we are reviewing the mechanism, loan terms and eligibility of fisheries loans to enable the loans to better cope with fishermen's needs. A review of the ex-gratia allowances for mariculturists and fishermen affected by marine works is also underway. We will discuss the relevant matters with the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene in due course.

Management of fixed pitch hawker areas

11. Fire has repeatedly broken out at fixed-pitch hawker areas. In order to minimise the fire risks posed by hawker stalls, the Government has launched a public consultation to gauge public views on our proposed measures to improve the management of hawker stalls. The consultation will last till 7 May 2012.

12. Fixed pitch hawking is part of the local culture. Moreover, the physical environment and the expectation of residents vary with individual districts. Hence, we will not implement a one-size-fits-all package of measures across the board in all hawker areas. Instead, we will take into account the surroundings and characteristics of individual hawker areas in the implementation of one or more improvement measures on a case-by-case basis. During the process, we will take into consideration the views of all stakeholders, including stall hawkers, District Councils and the public.

Animal Welfare

13. Finally, I will outline the Government's new measures to promote animal welfare. These include the following –

- (1) the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), in conjunction with the Police, the FEHD and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong), set up a special working group last year to review the work on handling animal cruelty cases. The working group focuses on enhancing mutual support, developing guidelines for higher efficiency, and establishing a mechanism for relevant professional departments and Animal Welfare Organisations (AWOs) to provide expert advice, with a view to ensuring an all-round investigation of such cases;
- (2) starting from 2011-12, the AFCD has set aside an additional funding of \$1 million for application by the AWOs, so as to encourage them to organise more activities relating to animal welfare;
- (3) we are reviewing the legislation on regulation of the pet trade and will consult the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on the relevant proposal in the second quarter of 2012.

14. Madam Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to answer questions from Members.