

**Speaking Note for Secretary for Food and Health
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee
on 4 April 2014**

Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

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 2014-15 Estimates, about \$6.3 billion has been earmarked for recurrent expenditure in the policy portfolio of "Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene", representing an increase of \$340 million (5.7%) over the previous year and accounting for 2% of recurrent government expenditure.

3. New resources available in this financial year are mainly used to provide –

- additional funding of about \$213 million to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to cope with the rise in outsourcing contract prices (including implication arising from upward adjustment of the statutory minimum wage rate);
- additional funding of about \$15 million to create two task forces in the FEHD to strengthen enforcement actions against illegal extension of food business area;

- one-off allocation of \$10 million for the FEHD to implement black spot cleansing initiatives laid down by the District Administration Summit in 2014-15;
- additional funding of about \$6.6 million for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to step up enforcement of the trawl ban;
- additional funding of about \$4.7 million for the AFCD to enhance animal management and animal welfare;
- additional funding of about \$3.4 million for the AFCD to enhance avian influenza (AI) surveillance; and
- additional funding of about \$2.3 million for the Government Laboratory to strengthen analytical services and develop testing methods to prepare for legislation to regulate formula products and foods for infants and young children.

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

Prevention and Control of AI

5. First of all, on the prevention and control of AI. Over the past decade or so, the Government and the local live poultry industry, as well as the Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities and the farms supplying Hong Kong, have collaboratively built up a resilient and stringent system for the surveillance and control of AI, for the purpose of reducing the AI risks in Hong Kong. Since the occurrence of H7N9 AI cases in the Mainland last year, Hong Kong has been on high alert and taking measures to prevent the spread of the virus. We started conducting H7 AI Polymerase Chain Reaction tests on

imported live poultry from 11 April 2013, and further introduced the H7 AI serological test on 24 January 2014.

6. To enhance our work on this front, a total provision of \$64.7 million has been earmarked for AI surveillance in the 2014-15 Estimates, including \$13.7 million for the FEHD and \$51 million for the AFCD (of which about \$3.4 million is additional funding).

7. On 27 January 2014, the Government confirmed a number of positive H7 AI samples in a batch of imported live chickens. We immediately adopted a series of corresponding contingency measures in accordance with the Preparedness Plan for Influenza Pandemic on the Serious Response Level, including suspension of the import of live poultry from the Mainland, and enhanced AI surveillance of the local live chicken supply chain, etc, to prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

8. The Government is setting up a check-point for local live chickens at the Government farm in Ta Kwu Ling, so that in the event of the closure of the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market, this will enable the continued supply of local live chickens for the market and help mitigate the possible impact on the trade. We will continue to fortify our efforts on AI prevention and control to safeguard public health.

Food Safety

9. On food safety, the Regulation which governs pesticide residues in food will come into operation on 1 August 2014. The Centre for Food Safety has conducted technical meetings and briefings for food traders and local farmers and developed practical guidelines to help them prepare for the commencement of the Regulation. To tie in with the implementation of the Regulation, we will update the list of maximum residue limits/extraneous maximum residue limits for certain pesticide-food pairs as specified in its

Schedule 1. The proposed amendments will be introduced into the Legislative Council (LegCo) as soon as possible.

10. We will also table legislation at the LegCo this year to introduce the requirement on the nutritional composition of infant formula before complementary feeding to ensure that adequate nutrition is provided by these products. We will also introduce legislative control on the nutrition labelling of powdered formula and food products intended for infants and young children under the age of 36 months.

Public Markets and Hawkers

11. Many members are concerned about the policy on public markets and hawkers as well as their operating environment. The LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) has just established Subcommittees on these two subjects respectively. For the purpose of developing proposals to improve the operating environment of public markets thereby enabling them to fulfil the functions expected of them, the Government has commissioned a consultancy study. The study commenced in December 2013. If it progresses smoothly, we expect the consultant to submit the preliminary findings of the study in mid-2014.

12. On hawkers, to further enhance the fire resistance capability and electrical installations of hawker stalls, the FEHD launched in June 2013 a five-year assistance scheme covering about 4 300 hawkers in the 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas in the territory. Under the scheme, around 500 stalls which are located directly in front of staircase discharge points of buildings or obstructing access and operations of emergency vehicles will need to be relocated. At present, a mutually acceptable solution has been found for about 40% of such stalls (including cases of operators agreeing to relocate and reconstruct their stalls and cases where they opt to voluntarily surrender their licence in return for ex-gratia payment). In the coming year, we will continue to actively take

forward the assistance scheme. We will actively support the work of the two Subcommittees and jointly explore practical measures to improve the operating environment of public markets and hawkers.

Columbarium Policy

13. On regulation of the operation of private columbaria, we reported to the Panel in November 2013 on the progress made in formulating the statutory licensing scheme for private columbaria. Based on our updated deliberations and the further information gathered, we are finalising the detailed provisions of the draft legislation and aim to introduce the Private Columbaria Bill into the LegCo in the second quarter of 2014.

14. Meanwhile, in the interest of encouraging wider use of environmentally-friendly and sustainable means of handling cremains including scattering of ashes in Gardens of Remembrance or at sea, the Administration will continue with its efforts to foster the necessary mind-set change.

15. As for the district-based columbarium development scheme, the feasibility studies related to the potential sites across the 18 districts are by and large either completed or at an advanced stage by now, and we have been consulting the respective District Councils on individual columbarium development projects since the second quarter of 2012. In 2014, we will continue with the work in this respect. We hope to secure local support for the development scheme so as to ensure a stable supply of public columbarium niches in the short to medium term.

Animal Welfare

16. The Government attaches great importance to animal welfare and management. Our policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist in a harmonious way. We conducted a public consultation on the

proposals to better regulate pet trading in October 2012 and reported to the Panel on the outcome of the consultation at its meeting in April 2013. The attending Members and stakeholders expressed divergent views on the proposed new licensing regime. In the past few months, we have been keeping liaison with them to discuss the approach and details of regulation. We are considering their views carefully and plan to introduce the amendment regulation into the LegCo within this year. Besides, the Government will take forward the “Trap-Neuter-Return” trial programme for stray dogs and examine first-hand whether this management method is effective in reducing the number of stray dogs and the nuisance caused to the nearby community.

17. Public education is the key to safeguarding and promoting animal welfare. We will continue to step up our efforts in publicity and education. In addition, we will reinforce stray animal management through a number of new and enhanced measures. Additional funding of about \$4.7 million will be allocated to the AFCD to recruit more staff for enhancing animal management and animal welfare (including stray animal management).

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