

**For discussion
on 13 January 2015**

**Legislative Council
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Arrangements for Separating Imported Live Poultry
from Local Live Poultry**

INTRODUCTION

On 30 December 2014, the Government found in a consignment of imported live poultry a number of samples which tested positive for H7 avian influenza (AI) by Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test. A series of measures were immediately adopted to prevent the spread of AI. Without compromising public health, the Government activated the Ta Kwu Ling (TKL) Check-point to ensure as far as possible the continued supply of local live poultry and minimise the possible impact on the trade. This paper reports the latest situation of the operation of the TKL Check-point.

**LATEST DEVELOPMENT ON THE RESPONSE MEASURES
AGAINST THE AI INCIDENT**

2. On 30 December 2014, the Government found in a consignment of imported live chickens a number of samples which tested positive for H7 avian influenza (AI) in serological tests, whilst all swab samples collected from the same consignment of live chickens were tested negative for H7 AI in PCR tests. The chickens concerned came from a registered farm in Huicheng District of Huizhou in Guangdong. According to the established risk management protocol, the relevant government departments collected 120 additional swab samples from the same consignment to conduct PCR testing. A number of samples were tested positive for H7 AI. To protect public health, the Government has decided to implement a series of measures in accordance with our contingency plan to prevent the spread of the virus.

3. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has immediately declared the Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Wholesale Poultry Market (CSWTWMP) an infected place. It has arranged on 31 December 2014 to cull all the 19 000 live poultry concerned. Thereafter the CSWTWMP was closed for 21 days (counting from the next day following completion of the culling operation). During this period, live poultry trading would be suspended for thorough cleansing and disinfection.

4. In accordance with the consensus reached between the Special Administrative Region Government and the Mainland on the handling of H7 AI cases, we have notified the relevant Mainland authorities of the incident to facilitate investigation of the source of infection. We would suspend supply of live poultry from the index registered farm for 21 days, during which the relevant inspection and quarantine authorities will conduct investigation at the farm concerned and ascertain that the farm has met all of the biosecurity and management requirements. Upon expiry of the 21-day suspension period, the relevant inspection and quarantine authorities will notify us of the investigation result. The farm concerned will resume supply of live poultry to Hong Kong only upon acceptance of the investigation result by both sides.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMPORTED LIVE POULTRY

5. A summary of the AI preventive and control measures that have been put in place over the years in relation to poultry, as well as the enhanced measures taken since April 2013 soon after confirmed H7N9 human infection cases came to light in the Mainland, could be found in the paper submitted to the Panel on 19 November 2013 (LC Paper No. CB(2)277/13-14(03)). We have since April 2013 introduced the PCR testing for H7 AI. On the basis of the then existing measures and following discussions with the relevant Mainland authorities, we have since January 2014 introduced the H7 serological testing to strengthen early warning against 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.

THE TA KWU LING ARRANGEMENT

6. In the light of the AI incident dated 27 January 2014, many people in Hong Kong, LegCo Members as well as stakeholders in the poultry trade have suggested to the Government that we should segregate the imported and local live poultry and hold the imported poultry at a suitable location until the AI testing results are available before releasing them to the wholesale market.

7. We have provided the Administration's response to this suggestion vide the paper submitted to the Panel on 11 March 2014 (LC Paper No. CB(2)992/13-14(03)). We set out in the paper that the Government had since been actively looking for appropriate sites, including the one in Fu Tei Au, for the temporary holding of imported live poultry until the testing results are available, before sending them to the wholesale poultry market. In the process, the Government has to take into account factors including the planning and usage of the land in question, the basic facilities required for temporary holding of live poultry, the impact that this arrangement may have on the neighbouring environment and community, and the lead time for preparation etc. As the deliberation process and the setting up of such facilities would take time, the Government had to consider other practicable alternative arrangements, such that live poultry import from the Mainland would be resumed as early as possible in a situation where the AI risk was under control. This would meet the demand for live poultry from the citizens, and minimise the impact on the poultry trade. After assessing various proposals, the Government decided to pursue the proposal of setting up a check-point for local live poultry at the Government farm in TKL.

8. In the process of studying the separation of imported and local live poultry and other practicable alternative arrangements, the Government has been engaging the live poultry trade dealing with local live chickens, including local farmers, wholesalers, transporters and retailers, to seek their views. Upon making the decision to take forward the TKL proposal, we also discussed with them in detail the concrete operational arrangements of how best the Government could set up the check-point for local live chickens at the TKL Government farm. When the TKL proposal had been confirmed, we also kept in touch with the TKL Rural Committee, resident representatives, and members of the Voice For Land Justice by means of meetings and written correspondence to explain to them the operation of the TKL Check-point as well as the biosecurity and environmental protection measures in place.

9. After the closure of the CSWTWPM as a result of the AI incident dated 31 December 2014, AFCD had stepped up inspection on local farms and collected more samples for testing, confirming that all local chicken farms are not affected by AI. As such, local chickens could, in principle, be despatched to retail outlets via the TKL Check-point starting from 6 January 2015 for the purpose of ensuring continued supply of live poultry to the market and reducing the possible impact on the trade. Before activating the TKL Check-point, the Government has once again discussed with stakeholders the operational details with a view to reaching a consensus to ensure the smooth operation of the TKL Check-point. However, some members of the trade and the TKL resident representatives expressed concern about the detailed arrangements associated with activation of the TKL Check-point. The live poultry wholesalers changed their plans in the eleventh hour, and informed AFCD that they would not despatch local live chickens via the TKL Check-point that night. In this connection, we decided in the evening of 6 January 2015 to put on hold activation of the TKL arrangements, and continued to engage the stakeholders with a view to resolving residual concerns.

10. Some members of the live poultry trade considered the TKL Check-point incompatible with the operation of the trade. On this, we hope the trade could understand that the TKL Check-point is not a wholesale market, and its mode of operation is necessarily different from CSWTWPM. As such, the trade needs to temporarily adjust their mode of operation. Considering the time spent on preparing the Check-point, the concerns of the neighbourhood, the land constraints including the need for site formation, installation of water and electricity supply, collection of waste water and sewerage facilities etc., coupled with the need to adhere to the principles governing the proper use of public money and land resources, we appeal for cooperation from the trade (including local farms, wholesalers, transporters and retailers) and collaboration in ensuring the smooth operation of the TKL Check-point thereby allowing continued supply of live poultry to the local market, and reducing the impact on the trade as a whole.

11. Resident representatives have expressed concern about the operation of the TKL Check-point. We wish to stress that, for the purpose of ensuring that live chickens supplied to the market are not infected with AI, all local live chickens are subject to stringent inspection and quarantine procedures prior to their release from the farm. On the other hand, the facilities and operation of the TKL Check-point are also in compliance with the prevailing biosecurity and environmental protection requirements.

They have been designed to safeguard public health, uphold effective management of AI risk, and minimise impact on the neighbourhood. Besides, the TKL Check-point is only an emergency and temporary arrangement. It will not operate for a prolonged period of time. Apart from explaining to the resident representatives the detailed operational arrangements of the TKL Check-point on various previous occasions, we have arranged for them a site visit cum meeting on 9 January 2015 to facilitate their better understanding of the operation of the TKL Check-point.

12. After months of dialogue, various parties eventually reached a consensus on 9 January 2015 and agreed on the supply of local live poultry to the retail outlets via the TKL Check-point prior to the resumption of live poultry trading at the CSWTWPM on 22 January 2015. The first batch of local live chickens has been delivered to various retail outlets on the territory on 11 January 2015. We will closely monitor the operation of the TKL Check-point, and conduct timely assessment for improvements to ensure that the demand for live poultry from citizens is satisfied under a situation where the AI risk is contained, whilst at the same time easing the impact on the live poultry trade and minimising possible nuisance to residents in the vicinity of the TKL Check-point.

13. Meanwhile, there are voices from different quarters requesting the relocation of the CSWTWPM. If the Government were to identify land for the addition of separation facility for imported and local live poultry, we have to give similar consideration to possible impact on the neighbourhood. Given the scarcity of land resources in Hong Kong and our population density, we consider the establishment of an added long-term live poultry separation facility not feasible from the land use and AI risk management perspectives.

LONG-TERM POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

14. Contact with infected live poultry is the main source of risk insofar as human infection by AI is concerned. 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. To mitigate the AI risks, the local live poultry trade has put in a lot of efforts and resources to ensure that the farms comply with all the biosecurity measures. Likewise, the Government has invested a lot of

public resources in the inspection and testing of imported and local live poultry, as well as the surveillance and biosecurity measures adopted in the supply chain of live poultry. The Mainland inspection and quarantine authorities and the farms supplying Hong Kong have also made significant efforts to ensure the safety of live poultry supplied to Hong Kong. However, no surveillance system can attain zero risk. Occasionally we would still encounter AI cases, which may pose threat to public health, exert impacts on the community including the poultry trade and bring anxiety and worries to the citizens, at a considerable cost to society on the whole. On public health grounds, we should consider whether Hong Kong, being a place with scarce land resources and a densely populated city, should continue with the practice enabling close contact between humans and poultry. In recent years, we have also observed a change in the eating habit of the ordinary citizens such that there has been a growing consumption of chilled and frozen poultry on the whole. We believe it is time for the Government, the poultry trade and the citizens to reflect on whether the selling of live poultry in Hong Kong remains appropriate in the long run. The Government will shortly engage a consultant to study and make recommendation in this regard.

ADVICE SOUGHT

15. Members are invited to note the content of the paper. The Government will remain vigilant in taking actions to prevent and control AI, and report to this Panel on the latest developments as and when appropriate.

**Food and Health Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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