

(Translation)

(Letterhead of Food and Health Bureau)

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24 August 2015

Clerk to LegCo Panel on Food Safety and  
Environmental Hygiene  
(Attn.: Miss Josephine SO)  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Miss So,

**Incidents in relation to malachite green in fish**

Thank you for referring to us the letter of Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki dated 7 August 2015 to the Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene. Regarding the concern of Dr Hon KWOK on incidents in relation to malachite green in fish, our response is as follows:

Malachite green is a type of industrial dye and has been used for treating infection in fish. Major agricultural economies such as the Mainland, the European Union, Canada and the United States prohibit the use of the chemical in food fish. According to the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF), no food sold in Hong Kong is allowed to contain malachite green. Offenders will be prosecuted and will be liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for six months upon conviction.

### *Control of Imported Fish*

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) adopts the World Health Organization's "from farm to table" strategy in its work in safeguarding food safety in Hong Kong. On control at source, administrative arrangements are in place whereby import of aquatic products from the Mainland must be sourced from aquatic farms registered with the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). The Mainland authorities monitor the operation of the registered aquatic farms, including the use of veterinary drugs. The relevant Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureaux issue an official veterinary health certificate to accompany each consignment of aquatic products, certifying that no prohibited veterinary drugs were used in the farming process and the amount of veterinary drug residues in fish do not exceed the maximum limit.

### *Practices of Local Aquaculture Products*

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) implements the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme (AFFS) to increase the competitiveness of the local aquaculture products and to provide quality and safe aquaculture products to the public. Participating farms are required to meet a set of good aquaculture practices and hygiene standards, and to follow a predefined management regime. Under the AFFS, AFCD provides technical support to the farmers and conduct regular inspections to the accredited farms. Before the product is introduced into the market, quality assurance tests are performed at different stages.

As for the other farms not participating in AFFS, AFCD provides technical support and advice to the fish farmers. AFCD inspects each local fish farm and collects samples for heavy metals and drugs testing under a surveillance programme. The surveillance programme, together with AFFS, covers all commercial fish farms in Hong Kong.

During a routine check under AFFS in a fish farm in Cheung Sha Wan fish culture zone on 8 July 2015, a trace amount (10 part per billion) of malachite green (MG) was detected in a skewband grunt sample (細鱗). AFCD has then issued a press release on the finding and conducted an investigation.

AFCD has reviewed the operation of the fish farm concerned. The farm has a good record of compliance in farm hygiene and food safety standards under AFFS. The farm joined AFFS in 2014, and since then AFCD has visited it ten times and collected 18 samples from that farm for MG and other harmful substance testing. All samples collected were satisfactory except the one sample in the above incident. There is also no further detection of MG in other samples taken from the farm after the incident.

Based on the above findings and the records of the fish farm concerned, it is unlikely that MG has been used in the farm. The trace amount of MG detected in one sample might be caused by contamination of the fish before being stocked in the farm. Even though the amount of MG detected was very low and only found in one sample, we have advised the operator of the farm to dispose of the batch of fish in question as a precautionary measure. The farmer has agreed and already disposed of that batch of fish.

Apart from additional samples from the fish farm concerned, some 70 samples have also been taken from other local fish farms including those in other fish culture zones and pond fish farms. No MG has been found in all these samples.

At present, AFCD collects some 200 marketable fish samples per year from local fish farms for MG testing. No MG has been detected in any of the samples except the incident in question.

### *Food Surveillance Programme*

At the downstream of the food supply chain, the food surveillance programme is a key component to ensure food safety.

Under the food surveillance programme, CFS adopts a risk-based principle in determining the types of samples to be collected, the frequency and number of samples taken for testing, and the types of laboratory analysis to be conducted so as to ensure that the food on sale comply with regulations and are fit for human consumption. Over the past three years, CFS has collected over 700 samples of fish (including imported fish and local culture fish) and fish products to test for MG. Traces of MG were detected in four samples of freshwater grouper (including the sample in the announcement on 6 August) and one sample of green grouper. After the testing was completed, CFS had announced the test results.

Concerning the unsatisfactory sample detected in August, CFS has taken follow-up actions, including directing the vendor concerned to stop sale of the affected batch of the products, informing the trade of the incident, and investigating the source and distribution of the affected products. CFS will also consider taking prosecution action.

CFS will continue to collect samples to monitor the amount of veterinary drug residues in aquatic products.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

( Ricky Cheng )

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.: Controller, Centre for Food Safety (Fax: 2536 9731)

Director, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

(Fax: 2311 3731)