

**Follow-up to the Meeting of  
the LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
on 10 November 2015**

**Election of members from the veterinary profession to  
the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong**

The updated proposal on the election of members from the veterinary profession to the Veterinary Surgeons Board (VSB) of Hong Kong was presented to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on 10 November 2015. During the discussion, we briefed Members on the outcome of the Government's consultation conducted in mid-2015 with the veterinary profession on the salient features of the proposed rules governing the election. When commenting on the Government's revised voting arrangements which were proposed in response to the views received at that consultation, some Members had expressed concerns about the representativeness of the responses received which totalled only 55. A Member also asked for sight of the consultation materials issued to the veterinary profession. In view of Members' comments, the Government decided to conduct a further round of consultation with the veterinary profession on the voting arrangement, with a view to reaching out to more registered veterinary surgeons (RVSs) in Hong Kong to ascertain more accurately the preference of the profession.

2. This paper sets out the outcome of the further consultation done.

**Opinion sought from the veterinary profession**

3. On 16 December 2015, a questionnaire survey was conducted to seek the opinions of RVSs on the voting arrangement for electing RVSs to VSB. The merits and demerits of different voting arrangements (including "One Vote vs Multiple votes" and "Voting in-person vs Voting by-post") were explained in order to help RVSs better understand the issues involved. RVSs were given one and a half months to respond to the survey. At the end of the survey period, a total of 193 responses among the 820 RVSs<sup>1</sup> were received. The covering letter and the questionnaire are attached at **Annex** for Members' reference.

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<sup>1</sup> As at 14 December 2015

## **One Vote vs Multiple votes**

4. Among the 193 responses received, 132 respondents (or 68.4%) were of the view that each elector should be allowed to vote for one or more than one candidate up to the maximum number of seats to be elected, while 47 respondents (or 24.3%) were of the view that each elector should vote for one candidate in each election. The others (14 respondents, or 7.3%) either expressed no strong view, or raised other suggestions (such as preferential vote for a number of candidates voted). Hence a large majority of the respondents (68.4%) preferred having multiple votes.

## **Voting in-person vs by-post**

5. Of the 193 responses received, 13 respondents (or 6.7%) opted for voting in-person, while 129 respondents (or 66.8%) preferred the voting-by-post arrangement. Another 23 respondents (or 11.9%) supported the availability of both by-post and online / electronic mode of voting, while the remaining 28 respondents (or 14.5%) either expressed no strong view, or preferred other voting methods including by fax, by email and online voting. In sum, a large majority of respondents (152, or 78.8%) supported voting-by-post. A minority of respondents (6.7%) preferred only voting in-person.

## **Other opinions**

6. A small number of respondents (18, or 9.3%) also made some additional comments in the replied questionnaire. These comments ranged from elaboration of the respondents' reasoning behind their choice of multiple votes and voting by-post; explanation of overseas practice in voting; indication of preference for allowing online voting; suggestion to restrict voting by only RVSS with a practising certificate; to having more veterinarians than lay people on VSB. Such comments were diverse and did not contradict the majority views as outlined in the foregoing paragraphs.

7. The outcome of the latest round of consultation by and large echoed the views received by the Government during the previous consultation in mid-2015, viz. the majority of the veterinary profession supported the voting arrangements which permit casting of one or more than one vote up to the total number of seats to be returned, as well as voting by post.

### **Way Forward**

8. Having regard to the veterinary profession's views, the Government would draw up the Election Regulation accordingly for submission to the LegCo in the 2016/17 legislative session.

**Food and Health Bureau**  
**Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department**  
**July 2016**

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16 December 2015

**Attention: All Registered Veterinary Surgeons of Hong Kong**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Seeking Your Opinion on the Voting Arrangements  
for the Election of Members from the Veterinary Profession to  
the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong**

You are invited to express your opinion on the voting arrangements for the proposed election of members from the veterinary profession to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB).

**Background**

You may recall that we consulted you in April 2015 on the salient features of the proposed rules governing the abovementioned election. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) also organised two consultation forums in May 2015 to explain the proposals and listen to your views directly. At the end of the consultation, the Government has received a total of 55 responses from the veterinary profession. Taking into account the views received, the Government has revised the proposals and consulted the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) of the Legislative Council (LegCo) on 10 November 2015. The Panel paper, which sums up the outcome of the consultation with the veterinary profession and the revised proposed arrangements for the election to the VSB, can be downloaded from LegCo's website<sup>1</sup>.

Specifically, on the voting arrangements for the election, taken heed of the views of the respondents, the Government has proposed that **each elector should be permitted to cast one or more than one vote, up to the total number of seats to be elected, and that the voting could be done by post.**

Panel Members were generally content with the revised proposals put forward by the Government, but some of them held strong views against the two specific proposed voting arrangements as set out above. They also expressed concern that the 55 responses received during the previous consultation might not be representative of the majority views of the veterinary profession. The discussion at the Panel meeting can be accessed through LegCo's website<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr15-16/english/panels/fseh/papers/fseh20151110cb2-192-3-e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr15-16/english/panels/fseh/agenda/fseh20151110.htm>

In view of the concern expressed by LegCo Members, we would like to invite you to express your views on these voting arrangements specifically.

### **One Vote vs Multiple Votes**

The first issue is **whether an elector can only vote for one candidate or he/she can vote for one or more than one candidate up to the maximum number of seats to be elected.** Either voting arrangement has its merits and demerits. If an elector is allowed to cast more than one vote, there is worry that there might be a risk that the election could be dominated by bloc voting influenced by certain sizeable groups or organisations. On the other hand, if an elector could only cast vote for one candidate in an election, as the electoral base of the veterinary profession is relatively small<sup>3</sup>, the number of votes obtained by the elected members particularly for the last seats might be thinned out, which might to a certain extent undermine the representativeness and credibility of the election. It is noted that an elector is also allowed to cast votes in respect of the number of vacancies at the general elections of some local professional regulatory bodies such as the Medical Council of Hong Kong and the Social Workers Registration Board of Hong Kong.

### **Voting in-person vs by post**

The second issue is **whether the electors should be required to cast their votes in person or allowed to do so by post.** Again either arrangement has its merits and demerits. Voting in person provides the highest level of security as the identity of the elector could be verified and we could ensure that the elector casts the vote in private without influence by others. The downside is that it is complicated and costly to operate multiple polling stations for such a small electoral base. Due to various reasons, some veterinary surgeons may also not be able to cast their votes at the designated venue during the designated hours. This might discourage electors from taking part in the election, leading to poor response rate. Voting by post, on the other hand, has the greatest flexibility and helps induce a higher degree of participation by the veterinary profession. It is also a common practice adopted by many other local and overseas professional regulatory bodies, such as the Medical Council of Hong Kong, the Social Workers Registration Board of Hong Kong and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Council of the U.K.

### **Your Opinion**

Against the considerations set out in the above paragraphs, you are invited to indicate your preference by completing the attached reply slip and returning it to AFCD by **31 January 2016**.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your continued support to the development of the local veterinary profession.

Yours faithfully,



(Michelle Yeung)

for Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

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<sup>3</sup> As at 14 December 2015, there were 820 registered veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Submission number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date received: \_\_\_\_\_

**Reply Slip**

**ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION TO  
THE VETERINARY SURGEONS BOARD (VSB)**

**QUESTIONS FOR RESPONSE**

Please indicate your answer to the following questions by filling the box with an “✓”

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Clinic: \_\_\_\_\_ (Optional)

**Question 1 : Whether an elector should be allowed to cast one vote or more than one vote in an election?**

- One vote     One or more than one vote, up to the number of vacancies (i.e. up to six votes in an ordinary election)     Others (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )     No preference

**Question 2 : Whether an elector should cast a vote in person or by post?**

- In-person voting     Postal voting     Others (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ )     No preference

**Question 3 : Any other comments? (Please indicate below)**

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**-End-**

