

[English Translation]

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Miss Josephine SO
Clerk to LegCo Panel on Food Safety and
Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong.
(Fax No: 2509 9055)

Dear Miss SO,

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Letter from Hon Steven HO Chun-yin**

I refer to your letter dated 13 January 2016 attaching therewith the letter of 11 January 2016 from Hon Steven HO Chun-yin to Hon Tommy CHEUNG, Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel). In his letter, Hon Ho expressed concerns about the incident of massive deaths of cultured fish in a number of fish culture zones (FCZs) in December last year.

Upon receipt of the report on the massive death of cultured fish in Yim Tin Tsai FCZ on 23 December last year, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had immediately liaised with the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) to step up monitoring of the water quality of that FCZ and the waters nearby and collected water samples for testing. AFCD has since been keeping a close watch on the situation of that FCZ. In the past few weeks, AFCD has kept in view the development of red tides formed by *Karenia mikimotoi* in the waters of Tolo Harbour to Long Harbour. Meanwhile, reports of death of cultured fish had been received from the nearby FCZs including Sham Wan, Lo Fu Wat, Yung Shue Au, Yim Tin Tsai (East), Kau Lau Wan and Tap Mun FCZs. Based on the information gathered at the moment, AFCD believes that the red tides observed in the above-mentioned waters and the algal species involved might have been one of the causes for the deaths of cultured fish in these FCZs. AFCD and EPD will keep up the surveillance and conduct in-depth investigations based on the data and information gathered from different sources. Separately, AFCD has enhanced the surveillance of the water quality and the presence of planktonic algae, and the surveillance and collection of samples have been extended to cover all of the 26 FCZs in the territory. No other FCZs have been found to be affected so far.

To alleviate the impact of red tides on the marine fish culture industry, AFCD has been implementing a phytoplankton monitoring programme. Under the programme, AFCD conducts sampling in different areas of Hong Kong waters on a weekly basis to analyse planktonic algae in water. More than 3 000 marine water samples are tested each year. Moreover, AFCD have put in place 24-hour real-time monitoring of water quality in the waters of six of the FCZs. If any abnormal increase in phytoplankton or any irregularities in the water samples are detected, AFCD will collect more samples for testing and issue timely alerts to mariculturists. When red tides are observed and massive death of cultured fish is found, AFCD will coordinate with the departments concerned (including EPD, the Marine Department (MD) and the Food and Environmental Health Department (FEHD)) to take contingency measures. These include, among others, helping mariculturists to remove temporarily their rafts from the FCZs affected by red tides when necessary, clearing the dead fish, and providing information on the algal biotoxins.

In the above-mentioned cultured fish death incident, AFCD had immediately kept the mariculturists informed of the development of red tides through SMS messages and advised the mariculturists likely to be affected to consider harvesting their stock early to minimise risks. AFCD has also updated the Red Tide Expert Advisory Group, comprising local scholars with expertise in red tides, and consulted their advice on the situation. AFCD has also notified the Mainland authorities of the incident. In addition, AFCD has, in conjunction with MD and FEHD, been assisting the mariculturists in clearing the dead fish and coordinating with some mariculturists in need to remove temporarily their rafts from the FCZs. AFCD will liaise with relevant departments and discuss with them how to further enhance in a more effective manner the assistance to the mariculturists affected by the massive fish deaths in FCZs and the necessary follow-up actions in future red tide incidents.

To assist the mariculturists affected by the cultured fish death incident, AFCD has activated the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) and arranged for the registration of affected mariculturists between 13 and 22 January. Grants from the ERF will be made to affected mariculturists according to established criteria. The ERF aims to provide assistance to persons who are in need of urgent relief as a result of a natural disaster. Grants from the Fund are intended for relief and are not compensation. The aim is to provide immediate economic relief for affected mariculturists. Payments of grants are subject to periodic revision to reflect the situation of the marine fish culture industry and changes in wages. Affected mariculturists who need capital to rehabilitate their business may also consider making application to AFCD for loans under the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Loan Fund.

The Government is committed to supporting the sustainable development of the fisheries industry and conserving local fisheries resources. As for promoting the sustainable development of the local aquaculture industry, AFCD has over the past few years been implementing progressively the recommendations of the Report of the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries, including reviewing the prevailing management and regulatory regime for local aquaculture; introducing a pilot scheme on the issuance of new marine fish culture licences; and exploring suitable sites within Hong Kong waters for the designation of new FCZs and expanding existing ones which are overcrowded. AFCD has also been actively implementing other measures to improve the fish culture environment, such as deploying biofilters in FCZs, encouraging mariculturists to adopt modern modes of operation and use pellet feed, with a view to enhancing the productivity of fish farming and reducing any adverse impacts on the water quality and the environment. Besides, AFCD has, in collaboration with the Civil Engineering and Development Department, carried out works at suitable FCZs to remove the siltation on the seabed in order to improve the water quality and the environment of the FCZs. In 2014, the Government also launched a Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund to help the fisheries industry to enhance its overall competitiveness and promote sustainable development. The Government will continue to refine the measures already implemented, and keeps an open mind on exploring other feasible and equitable new measures.

Yours sincerely,

(Hinny Lam)
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation