



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局  
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat  
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

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16 December 2016

Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
[Attn.: Miss Josephine SO]

Dear Miss SO,

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Information requested by Members regarding  
Incidents of hairy crabs detected with dioxins**

With regard to the supplementary questions raised by the Members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene at the meeting on 8 November regarding the incidents of hairy crabs detected with dioxins, we set out our responses below:

**(a) Testing of hairy crab samples on dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)**

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has collected a total of 18 hairy crab samples for tests on dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs during the hairy crab season this year starting in late September under the seasonal food surveillance programme. Test results showed that three of the samples were found to contain dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs at a total level exceeding the action level adopted by the CFS

[6.5 picograms toxic equivalent per gram of the food sample (wet weight)]. The testing results were made public through press releases and briefings to the media.

**(b) Action level for dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs**

Dioxins are a group of chemical compounds which are persistent environmental pollutants and highly toxic. They can cause reproductive and developmental problems, damage the immune system, interfere with hormones and can cause cancer. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs as human carcinogens. Dioxins arise either naturally or as by-products of industrial activities, e.g. metal smelting, molding or burning of chlorine-containing organic chemicals such as plastics. Dioxins are fat-soluble and not easily broken down which tend to accumulate in fatty tissues and along the food chain.

Section 54 of the Public Health and Municipal Service Ordinance (Cap. 132) requires that foods for sale and are intended for human consumption should be fit for human consumption. Dioxins are ubiquitous in the environment. At present, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) has not recommended any standards on dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in foods. While the limit on the level of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in foods has not been set out in our food safety legislation, considering international practices and local dietary habits (i.e. edible portions of crabs including brown meat and white meat<sup>1</sup> are generally consumed), CFS currently adopts an action level of 6.5 picograms (pg) toxic equivalent per gram (6.5 parts per trillion) of the food sample (wet weight) for dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in edible portion of hairy crabs for the purpose of food surveillance in 2016. We would continue to keep in view the monitoring and regulatory arrangements and measures over dioxins in food in the international arena, and continue to review and optimize our measures and work in this regard.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown meat includes gonads, livers and digestive glands whereas white meat includes muscle meat from appendages of the crabs.



**(c) Scope of testing in respect of hairy crabs under the seasonal food surveillance programme**

The scope of testing in respect of hairy crabs under the seasonal food surveillance programme includes veterinary drug residues (such as nitrofurans), metallic contaminants (such as mercury and arsenic), synthetic hormones, colouring matters (such as sudan dyes), pesticide residues, dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs, malachite green, and oxalic acid.

**(d) - (e) "Measures for Supervising and Administering the Inspection and Quarantine of Exit Aquatic Animals (出境水生動物檢驗檢疫監督管理辦法)" by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine**

All registered aquaculture farms and transit farms are supervised by the Mainland authority. According to our understanding, the Mainland authority conducts routine inspections to the farms so as to ensure their compliance with the requirements set out in the "Measures for Supervising and Administering the Inspection and Quarantine of Exit Aquatic Animals (出境水生動物檢驗檢疫監督管理辦法)" ("the Measures") by the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ) (a copy of the Measures is available on AQSIQ's website<sup>2</sup>). Control measures include but are not limited to the monitoring of feed use, animal and personnel movement, drug use, animal diseases as well as farming environment. Official health certificates are issued to certify the food safety of the commodities.

**(f) - (g) Communication arrangements with Mainland authorities**

We have established a close working relationship and efficient notification mechanism with the relevant Mainland authorities for handling food incidents. Also, the CFS has discussed with its Mainland counterparts about the relevant food surveillance findings and the risk assessment.

The CFS has been maintaining close contact with the Mainland authority on the detection of dioxins in hairy crabs, including notifying the Mainland authority of the detection of dioxins/dioxin-like PCBs which had exceeded the CFS's action level

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<sup>2</sup> [http://big5.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2007-09/03/content\\_735499.htm](http://big5.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2007-09/03/content_735499.htm)

in the three hairy crab samples. Both sides have attached great importance to the matter and have been discussing about the monitoring and regulatory arrangements for the import of hairy crabs to Hong Kong on public health and scientific grounds, including the standard and methodology for testing dioxin level in hairy crabs. The CFS will continue to liaise with the Mainland authority on the issue.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Chan' or similar, written in a cursive style.

( Kenneth Chan)  
for Secretary for Food and Health

cc: Director of Food & Environmental Hygiene  
(Attn: Controller, Centre for Food Safety) (Fax: 2536 9731)